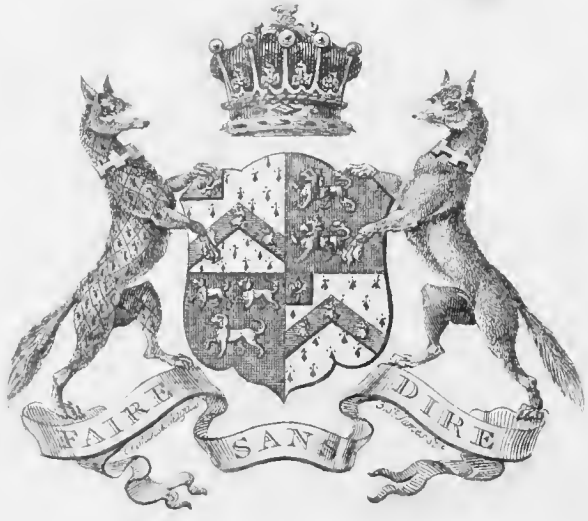

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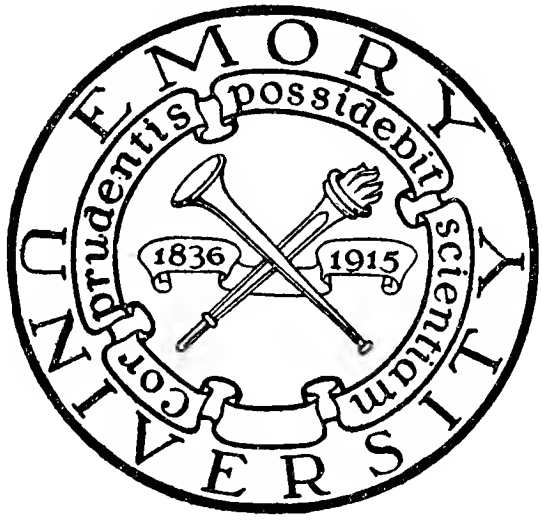

H E L E N,

A TALE.

BY

MARIA EDGEWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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HELEN.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT this time a circumstance occurred, which seemed to have nothing to do with Churchill, or Beauclerc, but which eventually brought both their characters into action and passion.

Lord Davenant had purchased, at the sale of Dean Stanley's pictures, several of those which had been the Dean's favourites, and which, independently of their positive merit, were peculiarly dear to Helen. He had ordered that they should be sent down to Clarendon Park; at first, he only begged house-room for them from the General while he and Lady Davenant were in Russia; then he said that in case he should never return he wished the pictures

should be divided between his two dear children, Cecilia and Helen; and that, to prevent disputes, he would make the distribution of them himself now, and in the kindest and most playful manner he allotted them to each, always finding some excellent reason for giving to Helen those which he knew she liked best; and then there was to be a *hanging committee*, for hanging the pictures, which occasioned a great deal of talking, Beauclerc always thinking most of Helen, or of what was really best for the paintings; Horace most of himself and his amateurship.

Among these pictures were some fine Wouvermans, and other hunting and hawking pieces, and one in particular of the Duchess and her ladies, from Don Quixote. Beauclerc, who had gone round examining and admiring, stood fixed when he came to this picture, in which he fancied he discovered in one of the figures some likeness to Helen; the lady had a hawk upon her wrist. Churchill came up eagerly to the examination, with glass at eye. He could not discern the slightest resemblance to Miss Stanley; but he was in haste to bring

out an excellent observation of his own, which he had made his own from a Quarterly Review, illustrating the advantage it would be to painters to possess knowledge, even of kinds seemingly most distant from the line of their profession.

"For instance now, *à priori*, one should not insist upon a great painter's being a good ornithologist, and yet, for want of being something of a bird-fancier, look here what he has done—quite absurd, a sort of hawk introduced, such as never was or could be at any hawking affair in nature; would not sit upon lady's wrist or answer to her call — would never fly at a bird. Now you see this is a ridiculous blunder."

While Churchill plumed himself on this critical remark, Captain Warmsley told of who still kept hawks in England, and of the hawking parties he had seen and heard of— "even this year, that famous hawking in Wiltshire, and that other in Norfolk."

Churchill asked Warmsley if he had been at Lord Berners's when Landseer was there studying the subject of his famous hawking scene. "Have you seen it, Lady Cecilia?"

continued he; "it is beautiful; the birds seem to be absolutely coming out of the picture;" and he was going on with some of his connoisseurship, and telling of his mortification in having missed the purchase of that picture; but Warmsley got back to the hawking he had seen, and he became absolutely eloquent in describing the sport.

Churchill, though eager to speak, listened with tolerably polite patience till Warmsley came to what he had forgot to mention, — to the label with the date of place and year that is put upon the heron's leg; to the heron brought from Denmark, where it had been caught, with the label of having been let fly from Lord Berners's; "for," continued he, "the heron is always to be saved if possible, so, when it is down, and the hawk over it, the falconer has some raw beef ready minced, and lays it on the heron's back, or a pigeon, just killed, is sometimes used; the hawk devours it, and the heron quite safe, as soon as it recovers from its fright, mounts slowly upward aud returns to its heronry."

Helen listened eagerly, and so did Lady Cecilia, who said, "You know, Helen, our favourite Washington Irving quotes that in days of yore 'a lady of rank did not think herself completely equipped in riding forth, unless she had her tasselgentel held by jesses on her delicate hand.'"

Before her words were well finished, Beauclerc had decided what he would do, and the business was half done that is well begun. He was at the library table, writing as fast as pen could go, to give carte blanche to a friend, to secure for him immediately a whole hawking establishment which Warmsley had mentioned, and which was now upon public sale, or privately to be parted with by the present possessor.

At the very moment when Beauclerc was signing and sealing at one end of the room, at the other Horace Churchill, to whom something of the same plan had occurred, was charming Lady Cecilia Clarendon, by hinting to her his scheme—anticipating the honour of seeing one of his hawks borne upon her delicate wrist.

Beauclerc, after despatching his letter, came up just in time to catch the sound and the sense, and took Horace aside to tell him what he had done. Horace looked vexed, and haughtily observed, that he conceived his place at Erlesmede was better calculated for a hawking party than most places in England; and he had already announced his intentions to the ladies. The way was open to him — but Beauclerc did not see why he should recede; the same post might carry both their letters — both their orders."

"How far did your order go, may I ask?" said Churchill.

"Carte blanche."

Churchill owned, with a sarcastic smile, that he was not prepared to go quite so far in trampling upon impossibilities. He was not quite so young as Granville; he, unfortunately, had arrived at years of discretion — he said unfortunately; without ironical reservation, he protested from the bottom of his heart he considered it as a misfortune to have become that slow circumspect sort of creature which looks before it leaps. Even though this might save

him from the fate of the man who was in Sicily, still he considered it as unfortunate to have lost so much of his natural enthusiasm.

" Natural enthusiasm !" Beauclerc could not help repeating to himself, and he went on his own way. It must be confessed, as even Beauclerc's best friends allowed, counting among them Lady Davenant and his guardian, that never was man of sense more subject to that kind of temporary derangement of the reasoning powers which results from being what is called bit by a fancy; he would then run on straight forward, without looking to the right or the left, in pursuit of his object, great or small. That hawking establishment now in view completely shut out, for the moment, all other objects; and hawks, and tercels, and lures, filled his head; and before his imagination were hawking scenes, and Helen with a hawk on her wrist, looking most graceful — a hawk of his own training it should be. Then, how to train a hawk became the question. While he was waiting for the answer to his carte blanche, nothing better, or so good, could be done, as to make himself master of the whole business,

and for this purpose he found it essential to consult every book on falconry that could be found in the library, and a great plague he became to everybody in the course of this book-hunt.

"What a bore!" Warmsley might be excused for muttering deep and low between the teeth. General Clarendon sighed and groaned. Lady Davenant bore and forbore philosophically — it was for Beauclerc; and to her great philosophy she gave all the credit of her indulgent partiality. Lady Cecilia, half-annoyed yet ever good-natured, carried her complaisance so far as to consult the catalogue and book-shelves sundry times in one hour; but she was not famous for patience, and she soon resigned him to a better friend — Helen, the most indefatigable of book-hunters. She had been well trained to it by her uncle; had been used to it all her life; and really took pleasure in the tiresome business. She assured Beauclerc it was not the least trouble, and he thought she looked beautiful when she said so. Whosoever of the male kind, young, and of ardent, not to say impatient, spirit, has ever

been aided and abetted in a sudden whim, assisted, forwarded, above all, sympathised with, through all the changes and chances of a reigning fancy, may possibly conceive how charming, and more charming every hour, perhaps minute, Helen became in Beauclerc's eyes. But, all in the way of friendship observe. Perfectly so — on her part, for she could not have another idea, and it was for this reason she was so much at her ease. He so understood it, and, thoroughly a gentleman, free from coxcombry, as he was, and interpreting the language and manners of women with instinctive delicacy, they went on delightfully. Churchill was on the watch, but he was not alarmed; all was so undisguised and frank, that now he began to feel assured that love on her side not only was, but ever would be, quite out of the question.

Beauclerc was, indeed, in the present instance, really and truly intent upon what he was about; and he pursued the History of Falconry, with all its episodes, from the olden time of the Boke of St. Alban's down to the last number of the Sporting Magazine, including Colonel Thornton's latest flight, with the

adventures of his red falcons, Miss M'Ghee and Lord Townsend and his red tercels, Messrs. Croc Franc and Craignon;—not forgetting that never-to-be-forgotten hawking of the Emperor Arambombamboberus with Trebizonian eagles, on the authority of a manuscript in the Grand Signior's library.

Beauclerc had such extraordinary dependence upon the sympathy of his friends, that, when he was reading any thing that interested him, no matter what they might be doing, he must have their admiration for what charmed him. He brought his book to Lord Davenant, who was writing a letter. "Listen, oh, listen! to this pathetic lament of the falconer,—'Hawks, heretofore the pride of royalty, the insignia of nobility, the ambassadors' present, the priests' indulgence, companion of the knight, and nursling of the gentle mistress, are now uncalled-for and neglected.'"

"Ha! very well that," said good-natured Lord Davenant, stopping his pen, dipping again, dotting, and going on.

Then Beauclerc passaged to Lady Davenant, and, interrupting her in Scott's Lives of the

Novelists, on which she was deeply intent, "Allow me, my dear Lady Davenant, though you say you are no great topographer, to shew you this, it is so curious; this royal falconer's proclamation—Henry the Eighth's—to preserve his partridges, pheasants, and herons, from his palace at Westminster to St. Giles's *in the Fields*, and from thence to Islington, Hampstead, and Highgate, under penalty for every bird killed of imprisonment, or whatever other punishment to his Highnesse may seem meet."

Lady Davenant vouchsafed some suitable remark, consonant to expectation, on the changes of times, men, and manners, and then motioned the quarto away, with which motion the quarto reluctantly complied; and then, following Lady Cecilia from window to window, as she *tended* her flowers, he would insist upon her hearing the table of precedence for hawks. She, who never cared for any table of precedence in her life, even where the higher animals were concerned, fairly stopped her ears; that the merlin was a lady's hawk was all she would undertake to remember, and this only upon condition that she

should have one to sit upon her wrist like the fair ladies in Wouvermans' pictures. But further, as to Peregrine, Gerfalcon or Gerkin, she would hear nought of them, nor could she listen, though Granville earnestly exhorted, to the several good reasons which make a falcon dislike her master—

1st. If he speak rudely to her.

2nd. If he feed her carelessly.

Before he could get thirdly out, Lady Cecilia stopped him, declaring that in all her life she never could listen to any thing that began with *first* and *secondly* — reasons especially.

Horace, meanwhile, looked superior down, and thought with ineffable contempt of Beauclerc's little skill in the arts of conversation, thus upon unwilling ears to squander anecdotes which would have done him credit at some London dinner. "What I could have made of them!" thought he; "but some there are, who never can contrive, as other some cleverly do, to ride their hobby-horses to good purpose and good effect;—now Beauclerc's hobbies, I plainly see, will always run away with him headlong,

cost him dear certainly, and may be, leave him in the mire at last."

What this fancy was to cost him, Beauclerc did not yet know. Two or three passages in the Sporting Magazine had given some hints of the expense of this "most delectable of all country contentments," which he had not thought it necessary to read aloud. And he knew that the late Lord Orford, an ardent pursuer of this 'royal and noble' sport, had expended one hundred a-year on every hawk he kept, each requiring a separate attendant, and being moreover indulged in an excursion to the Continent every season during moulting-time; but Beauclerc said to himself he had no notion of humouring his hawks to that degree, they should, aristocratic birds though they be, content themselves in England, and not pretend to 'damn the climate like a lord.' And he flattered himself that he should be able to pursue his fancy more cheaply than any of his predecessors; but, as he had promised his guardian that after the indulgence granted him in the Beltravers cause, he would not call upon him for any more extraordinary supplies, he resolved, in

case the expense exceeded his ways and means, to sell his hunters, and so indulge a new love at the expense of an old one.

The expected pleasure of the first day's hawking was now bright in his imagination; the day was named, the weather promised well, and the German cadgers and trainers who had been engaged, and who, along with the whole establishment, were handed over to Beauclerc, came down to Clarendon Park, on their road to Granville Manor—a place of Beauclerc's, which was not far distant—and he was very happy teaching the merlins to sit on Lady Cecilia's and on Miss Stanley's wrist. Helen's voice was found to be peculiarly agreeable to the hawk, who, as Beauclerc observed, loved, like Lear, that excellent thing in woman, a voice ever soft, gentle, and low.

The ladies were to wear some pretty dresses for the occasion, and all was gaiety and expectation; and Churchill was mortified, when he saw how well the thing was likely to take, that he was not to be the giver of the fête, especially as he observed that Helen was particularly pleased — when, to his inexpressible surprise,

Granville Beauclerc came to him, a few days before that appointed for the hawking-party, and said that he had changed his mind, that he wished to get rid of the whole concern—that he should be really obliged to Churchill if he would take his engagement off his hands. The only reason he gave was, that the establishment would altogether be more than he could afford, he found he had other calls for money, which were incompatible with this fancy, and therefore he would give it up.

Churchill obliged him most willingly by taking the whole upon himself, and he managed so to do in a very ingenious way, without incurring any preposterous expense. He was acquainted with a set of rich fashionable young men, who had taken a sporting lodge in a neighbouring county, who desired no better than to accede to the terms proposed, and to distinguish themselves by giving a fête out of the common line, while Churchill, who understood, like a true man of the world, the worldly art of bargaining, contrived with off-hand gentleman-like jockeying, to have every point settled to his own convenience, and he was to

be the giver of the entertainment to the ladies at Clarendon Park.

When this change in affairs was announced, Lady Cecilia, the General, Lady Davenant, and Helen, were all, in various degrees, surprised, and each tried to guess what could have been the cause of Beauclerc's sudden relinquishment of his purpose. He was—very extraordinary for him — impenetrable: he adhered to the words "I found I could not afford it." His guardian could not believe in this wonderful prudence, and was almost certain "there must be some imprudence at the bottom of it all."

Granville neither admitted nor repelled that accusation. Lady Cecilia worked away with perpetual little strokes, hoping to strike out the truth, but, as she said, you might as well have worked at an old flint. Nothing was elicited from him, even by Lady Davenant; nor did the collision of all their opinions throw any light upon the matter.

Meanwhile the day for the hawking party arrived. Churchill gave the fête, and Beauclerc, as one of the guests, attended and en-

joyed it without the least appearance even of disappointment; and, so far from envying Churchill, he assisted in remedying any little defects, and did all he could to make the whole go off well.

The party assembled on a rising ground; a flag was displayed to give notice of the intended sport; the falconers appeared, picturesque figures in their green jackets and their long gloves, and their caps plumed with herons' feathers—some with the birds on their wrists—one with the frame over his shoulder upon which to set the hawk. *Set*, did we say?—no: "*cast* your hawk on the perch" is, Beauclerc observed, the correct term; for, as Horace sarcastically remarked, Mr. Beauclerc might be detected as a novice in the art by his over-exactness — his too correct, too attic, pronunciation of the hawking language. But Granville readily and gaily bore all this ridicule and raillery, sure that it would neither stick nor stain, enjoying with all his heart the amusement of the scene—the assembled ladies, the attendant cavaliers; the hoodwinked hawks, the ringing of their brass bells; the falconers anx-

iously watching the clouds for the first appearance of the bird; their skill in loosening the hoods, as, having but one hand at liberty, they used their teeth to untie the string: —— And now the hoods are off, and the hawks let fly.

They were to fly many castes of hawks this day: the first flight was after a curlew, and the riding was so hard, so dangerous, from the broken nature of the ground, that the ladies gave it up, and were contented to view the sport from the eminence where they remained.

And now there was a question to be decided among the sportsmen as to the comparative rate of riding at a fox chase, and in "the short, but terrifically hard gallop, with the eyes raised to the clouds, which is necessary for the full enjoyment of hawking;" and then the gentlemen, returning, gathered round the ladies, and the settling the point, watches in hand, and bets depending, added to the interest of flight the first, and Churchill, master of the revels, was in the highest spirits.

But presently the sky was overcast, the morning lowered, the wind rose, and changed was Churchill's brow; there is no such thing

as hawking against the wind — that capricious wind!

"Curse the wind!" cried Churchill, "and confusion seize the fellow who says there is to be no more hawking to-day!"

The chief falconer, however, was a phlegmatic German, and proper-behaved, as good falconers should be, who, as "Old Tristram's booke" has it, even if a bird should be lost, he should never swear, and only say, "*Dieu soit loué*," and "remember that the mother of hawks is not dead."

But Horace, in the face of reason and in defiance of his German counsellors, insisted upon letting fly the hawks in this high wind; and it so fell out that, in the first place, all the terms he used in his haste and spleen were wrong; and in the next, that the quarry taking down the wind, the horsemen could not keep up with the hawks: the falconers in great alarm, called to them by the names they gave them — "Miss Didlington," "Lord Berners." "Ha! Miss Didlington's off; — off with Blucher, and Lady Kirby, and Lord Berners, and all of 'em after her." Miss Didlington flew

fast and far, and further still, till she and all the rest were fairly out of sight — lost, lost, lost!

"And as fine a caste of hawks they were as ever came from Germany!"—the falconers were in despair, and Churchill saw that the fault was his; and it looked so like cockney sportsmanship! If Horace had been in a towering rage, it would have been well enough, but he only grew pettish, snappish, waspish: now none of those words ending in *ish* become a gentleman; ladies always think so, and Lady Cecilia now thought so, and Helen thought so too, and Churchill saw it, and he grew pale instead of red, and that looks ugly in an angry man.

But Beauclerc excused him when he was out of hearing; and when others said he had been cross and crosser than became the giver of a gala, Beauclerc pleaded well for him, that falconry has ever been known to be "an extreme stirrer-up of the passions, being subject to mischances infinite."

However, a cold and hot collation under the trees for some, and under a tent for others,

set all to rights for the present. Champagne sparkled, and Horace pledged and was pledged, and all were gay; even the Germans at their own table, after their own fashion, with their Rhenish and their foaming ale, contrived to drown the recollection of the sad adventure of the truant hawks.

And when all were refreshed and renewed in mind and body, to the hawking they went again. For now that

"The wind was laid, and all their fears asleep,"

there was to be a battle between heron and hawk, one of the finest sights that can be in all falconry.

"Look! look! Miss Stanley," cried Granville; "look! follow that high-flown hawk — that black speck in the clouds. Now! now! right over the heron; and now she will *cancelleer* — turn on her wing, Miss Stanley, as she comes down, whirl round, and balance herself —*chanceler*. Now! now look! cancelleering gloriously!"

But Helen at this instant recollected what Captain Warmsley had said of the fresh-killed pigeon, which the falconer in the nick of time is

to lay upon the heron's back; and now, even as the cancelleering was going on—three times most beautifully, Helen saw only the dove, the white dove, which that black-hearted German held, his great hand round the throat, just raised to wring it. "Oh, Beauclerc, save it, save it!" cried Lady Cecilia and Helen at once.

Beauclerc sprang forward, and, had it been a tiger instead of a dove, would have done the same no doubt at that moment; the dove was saved, and the heron killed. If Helen was pleased, so was not the chief falconer, nor any of the falconers, the whole German council in combustion! and Horace Churchill deeming it "Rather extraordinary that any gentleman should so interfere with other gentlemen's hawks."

Lady Cecilia stepped between, and never stepped in vain. She drew a ring from her finger—a seal; it was the seal of peace—no great value — but a well-cut bird — a bird for the chief falconer — a guinea-hen, with its appropriate cry, its polite motto, "Come back,

come back;" and she gave it as a pledge that the ladies would come back another day, and see another hawking; and the gentlemen were pleased, and the aggrieved attendant falconers pacified by a promise of another heron from the heronry at Clarendon Park; and the clouded faces brightened, and "she stroked the raven down of darkness till it smiled," whatever that may mean; but, as Milton said it, it must be sense as well as sound.

At all events, in plain prose, be it understood that every body was satisfied, even Mr. Churchill; for Beauclerc had repaired for him, just in time, an error which would have been a blot on his gallantry of the day. He had forgotten to have some of the pretty grey hairs plucked from the heron, to give to the ladies to ornament their bonnets, but Beauclerc had secured them for him, and also two or three of those much-valued, smooth, black feathers, from the head of the bird, which are so much prized that a plume of them is often set with pearls and diamonds. Horace presented these most gracefully to Lady Cecilia

and Helen, and was charmed with Lady Cecilia's parting compliments, which finished with the words "Quite chivalrous."

And so, after all the changes and chances of weather, wind, and humour, all ended well, and no one rued the hawking of this day.

CHAPTER II.

"BUT all this time," said Lady Davenant, "you have not told me whether you have any of you found out what changed Granville's mind about this falconry scheme—why he so suddenly gave up the whole to Mr. Churchill. Such a point-blank weathercock turn of fancy in most young men would no more surprise me than the changes of those clouds in the sky now shaped and now unshaped by the driving wind; but in Granville Beauclerc there is always some reason for apparent caprice, and the reason is often so ingeniously wrong that it amuses me to hear it, and, even as a study in human nature, I am curious to know the simple fact."

But no one could tell the simple fact, no one could guess his reason, and from him it never would have been known — never could have

been found out, but from a mistake — from a letter of thanks coming to a wrong person.

One morning, when Helen was sitting in Lady Davenant's room with her, Lord Davenant came in, reading a letter, like one walking in his sleep.

"What is all this, my dear? Can you explain it to me? Some good action of yours, I suppose, for which I am to be thanked."

Lady Davenant looked at the letter. She had nothing to do with the matter, she said; but, on second thoughts, exclaimed, "This is Granville Beauclerc's doing, I am clear!"

The letter was from Count Polianski, one of the poor banished Poles; now poor, but who had been formerly master of a property estimated at about one hundred and sixty-five thousand *available individuals.* In attempting to increase the happiness and secure the liberty of these available individuals, the Count had lost everything, and had been banished from his country — a man of high feeling as well as talents, and who had done all he could for that unhappy country, torn to

pieces by demagogues from within and tyrants from without.

Lady Davenant now recollected that Beauclerc had learned from her all this, and had heard her regretting that the circumstances in which Lord Davenant was placed at this moment, prevented the possibility of his affording this poor Count assistance for numbers of his suffering fellow-countrymen who had been banished along with him, and who were now in London in the utmost distress. Lady Davenant remembered that she had been speaking to Granville on this subject the very day that he had abandoned his falconry project. "Now I understand it all," said she; "and it is like all I know and all I have hoped of him. These hundreds a year which he has settled on these wretched exiles, are rather better disposed of in a noble national cause than in pampering one set of birds that they may fly at another set."

"And yet this is done," said Lord Davenant, "by one of the much reviled, high-bred English gentlemen — among whom, let the much

reviling, low-bred English democrats say what they will, we find every day instances of subscription for public purposes from private benevolence, in a spirit of princely charity to be found only in our own dear England—'England with all her faults.'"

"But this was a less ordinary sort of generosity of Granville's," said Lady Davenant, — "the giving up a new pleasure, a new whim with all its gloss fresh upon it, full and bright in his eye."

"True," said Lord Davenant; "I never saw a stronger-pulling fancy better thrown upon its haunches."

The white dove, whose life Helen had saved, was brought home by Beauclerc, and was offered to her and accepted. Whether she had done a good or a bad action, by thus saving the life of a pigeon at the expense of a heron, may be doubted, and will be decided according to the several tastes of ladies and gentlemen for herons or doves. As Lady Davenant remarked, Helen's humanity (or dove-anity, as Churchill called it,) was of that equivocal sort which is

ready to destroy one creature to save another which may happen to be a greater favourite.

Be this as it may, the favourite had a friend upon the present occasion, and no less a friend than General Clarendon, who presented it with a marble basin, such as doves should drink out of, by right of long prescription.

The General feared, he said, " that this vase might be a little too deep — dangerously perhaps——"

But Helen thought nothing could be altogether more perfect in taste and in kindness — approving Beauclerc's kindness too — a remembrance of a day most agreeably spent.

Churchill, to whom she looked, as she said the last words, with all becoming politeness, bowed and accepted the compliment, but with a reserve of jealousy on the brow ; and as he looked again at dove caressing and caressed, and then at the classic vase — he stood vexed, and to himself he said,

" So this is the end of all my pains — hawking and all, ' quite chivalrous !' Beauclerc carries off the honours and pleasures of the day,

and his present and his dove are to be all in all. Yet still," continued he to himself in more consolatory thought — " she is so open in her very love for the bird, that it is plain she has not yet any love for the man. She would be somewhat more afraid to shew it, delicate as she is. It is only friendship — honest friendship, on her side; and if her affections be not engaged somewhere else — she may be mine: if — if I please — if — I can bring myself fairly to propose — we shall see — I shall think of it."

And now he began to think of it seriously.— Miss Stanley's indifference to him, and the unusual difficulty which he found in making any impression, stimulated him in an extraordinary degree. Helen now appeared to him even more beautiful than he had at first thought her — " Those eyes that fix so softly," thought he, " those dark eyelashes — that blush coming and going so beautifully — and there is a timid grace in all her motions, with that fine figure too — and that high-bred turn of the neck ! — altogether she is charming ! and she will be thought so ! — she must be mine !"

She would do credit to his taste, he thought she would, when she had a little more *usage du monde*, do the honours of his house well, and it would be delightful to train her! — If he could but engage her affections before she had seen more of the world, she might really love him for his own sake — and Churchill wished to be really loved, if possible, for his own sake; but of the reality of modern love he justly doubted, especially for a man of his fortune and his age; yet, with Helen's youth and innocence he began to think he had some chance of disinterested attachment, and he determined to bring out for her the higher powers of his mind — the better parts of his character.

One day Lady Davenant had been speaking of London conversation. "So brilliant," said she, "so short-lived, as my friend Lady Emmeline K—— once said, 'London wit is like gas, which lights at a touch, and at a touch can be extinguished;" and Lady Davenant concluded with a compliment to him who was known to have this '*touch and go*' of good conversation to perfection.

Mr. Churchill bowed to the compliment, but afterwards sighed, and it seemed an honest sigh, from the bottom of his heart. Only Lady Davenant and Helen were in the room, and turning to Lady Davenant he said,

" If I have it, I have paid dearly for it, more than it is worth, much too dearly, by the sacrifice of higher powers; I might have been a very different person from what I am."

Helen's attention was instantly fixed, but Lady Davenant suspected he was now only talking for effect. He saw what she thought—it was partly true, but not quite. He felt what he said at the moment, and, besides, there is always a sincere pleasure in speaking of one's self when one can do it without exposing one's self to ridicule, and with a chance of obtaining real sympathy.

" It was my misfortune," he said, " to be spoiled, even in childhood, by my mother."

As he pronounced the word ' mother,' either his own heart or Helen's eyes made him pause with a look of respectful tenderness. It was cruel of a son to blame the fond indulgence of

a mother; but the fact was, she brought him too forward early as a clever child, fed him too much with that sweet dangerous fostering dew of praise. The child — the man — must suffer for it afterwards.

"True, very true," said Lady Davenant; "I quite agree with you."

"I could do nothing without flattery," continued he, pursuing the line of confession which he saw had fixed Lady Davenant's attention favourably. "Unluckily, I came too early into possession of a large fortune, and into the London world, and I lapped the stream of prosperity as I ran, and it was sweet with flattery, intoxicating, and I knew it, and yet could not forbear it. Then in a London life every thing is too stimulating — over-exciting. If there are great advantages to men of science and literature in museums and public libraries, the more than *Avicenna* advantages of having books come at will, and ministering spirits in waiting on all your pursuits — there is too much of every thing except time, and too little of that. The treasures are within

our reach, but we cannot clutch, we have, but we cannot hold. We have neither leisure to be good, nor to be great: who can think of living for posterity, when he can scarcely live for the day? and sufficient for the day are never the hours thereof. From want of time, and from the immense quantity that nevertheless must be known, comes the necessity, the unavoidable necessity, of being superficial."

"Why should it be an unavoidable necessity?" asked Lady Davenant.

"Because *should* waits upon *must*, in London always, if not elsewhere," said Churchill.

"A conversation answer," replied Lady Davenant.

"Yes, I allow it; it is even so, just so, and to such tricks, such playing upon words, do the bad habits of London conversation lead;" and Lady Davenant wondered at the courage of his candour, as he went on to speak of the petty jealousies, the paltry envy, the miserable selfish susceptibility generated by the daily competition of London society. Such dissensions, such squabbles — an ignoble but appro-

priate word — such deplorable, such scandalous squabbles among literary, and even among scientific men. "And who," continued he, "who can hope to escape in such a tainted atmosphere — an atmosphere overloaded with life, peopled with myriads of little buzzing stinging vanities! It really requires the strength of Hercules, mind and body, to go through our labours, fashionable, political, bel esprit, altogether too much for mortal. In parliament, in politics, in the tug of war you see how the strongest minds fail, come to untimely ——"

"Do not touch upon that subject," cried Lady Davenant, suddenly agitated. Then, commanding herself, she calmly added — "As you are not now, I think, in parliament, it cannot affect you. What were you saying? — your health of mind and body, I think you said, you were sensible had been hurt by ——"

"These straining, incessant competitions have hurt me. My health suffered first, then my temper — temper almost always follows health: mine has, certainly. It was originally

good, now, as you have seen, I am afraid"— glancing at Helen, who quickly looked down, "I am afraid I am irritable."

There was an awkward silence. Helen thought it was for Lady Davenant to speak; but Lady Davenant did not contradict Mr. Churchill. Now, the not contradicting a person who is abusing himself, is one of the most heinous offences to self-love that can be committed; and it often provokes false candour to pull off the mask and throw it in your face; but either Mr. Horace Churchill's candour was true, or it was so well guarded at the moment that no such catastrophe occurred.

"Worse than this bad effect on my temper," continued he, "I feel that my whole mind has been deteriorated — my ambition dwindled to the shortest span — my thoughts contracted to the narrow view of mere *effect;* what would please at the dinner-table or at the clubs — what will be thought by this literary coterie, or in that fashionable boudoir. And for this *reputation de salon* I have sacrificed all hope of other reputation, all power of obtaining it.

all hope of——" (here he added a few words murmured down to Lady Davenant's embroidery frame, yet still in such a tone that Helen could not help thinking he meant she should hear)—" If I had a heart such as—" he paused, and, as if struck with some agonizing thought, he sighed deeply, and then added —" but I have not a heart worth such acceptance, or I would make the offer."

Helen was not sure what these words meant, but she now pitied him, and she admired his candour, which she thought was so far above the petty sort of character he had at first done himself the injustice to seem, and she seized the first opportunity to tell Beauclerc all Mr Churchill had said to Lady Davenant and to her, and of the impression it had made upon them both. Beauclerc had often discussed Mr. Churchill's character with her, but she was disappointed when she saw that what she told made no agreeable impression on Beauclerc: at first he stood quite silent, and when she asked what he thought, he said —" It 's all very fine, very clever."

"But it is all true," said Helen, "and I admire Mr. Churchill's knowing the truth so well and telling it so candidly."

"Every thing Mr. Churchill has said may be true — and yet I think the truth is not in him."

"You are not usually so suspicious," said Helen. "If you had heard Mr. Churchill's voice and emphasis, and seen his look and manner at the time, I think you could not have doubted him."

The more eager she grew, the colder Mr. Beauclerc became. "Look and manner, and voice and emphasis," said he, "make a great impression, I know, on ladies."

"But what is your reason, Mr. Beauclerc, for disbelief? I have as yet only heard that you believe every thing that Mr. Churchill said was true, and yet that you do not believe in his truth," said Helen, in a tone of raillery.

And many a time before had Beauclerc been the first to laugh when one of his own paradoxes stared him in the face; but now he was more out of countenance than amused, and he

looked seriously about for reasons to reconcile his seeming self-contradiction.

"In the first place, all those allusions and those metaphorical expressions, which you have so wonderfully well remembered, and which no doubt were worth remembering; all those do not give me the idea of a man who was really feeling in earnest, and speaking the plain truth about faults, for which, if he felt at all, he must be too much ashamed to talk in such a grand style, and to talk of them at all, except to most intimate friends, seems so unnatural, and quite out of character in a man who had expressed such horror of egotists, and who is so excessively circumspect in general."

"Yes, but Mr. Churchill's forgetting all his little habits of circumspection, and all fear of ridicule, is the best proof of his being quite in earnest — that all he said was from his heart."

"I doubt whether he has any heart," said Beauclerc.

"Poor man, he said——" Helen began, and then recollecting the words, 'or I would make

the offer,' she stopped short, afraid of the construction they might bear, and then, ashamed of her fear, she coloured deeply.

"Poor man, he said——" repeated Beauclerc, fixing his eyes upon her, "What did he say, may I ask?"

"No,—" said Helen, "I am not sure that I distinctly heard or understood Mr. Churchill."

"Oh, if there was any mystery!" Beauclerc begged pardon.

And he went away very quickly. He did not touch upon the subject again, but Helen saw that he never forgot it, and, by a few words which she heard him say to Lady Davenant about his dislike to half-confidences, she knew he was displeased, and she thought he was wrong. She began to fear that his mistrust of Churchill arose from envy at his superior success in society; and, though she was anxious to preserve her newly-acquired good opinion of Churchill's candour, she did not like to lose her esteem for Beauclerc's generosity. Was it possible that he could be seriously hurt at the readiness with which Mr. Churchill availed him-

self of any idea which Beauclerc threw out, and which he dressed up, and passed as his own? Perhaps this might be what he meant by 'the truth is not in him.' She remembered that the first day Mr. Churchill had appeared at Clarendon Park, she sat between him and Beauclerc, and he did not seem to pay the least attention to what Mr. Beauclerc was saying to her; yet, fully occupied as he had apparently been in talking for the company in general, he had through all heard Granville telling the Chinese fable of the 'Man in the Moon, whose business it is to knit together with an invisible silken cord those who are predestined for each other.' Presently, before the dessert was over, Helen found the 'Chinese Man in the Moon,' whom she thought she had all to herself, figuring at the other end of the table, and received with great applause. And was it possible that Beauclerc, with his abundant springs of genius, could grudge a drop thus stolen from him? but without any envy in the case, he was right in considering such theft, however petty, as a theft, and in despising the meanness of the

thief. Such meanness was strangely incompatible with Mr. Churchill's frank confession of his own faults. Could that confession be only for effect?

Her admiration had been sometimes excited by a particular happiness of thought, beauty of expression, or melody of language in Mr. Churchill's conversation. Once Beauclerc had been speaking with enthusiasm of modern Greece, and his hopes that she might recover her ancient character; and Mr. Churchill, as if admiring the enthusiasm, yet tempering it with better judgment, smiled, paused, and answered.

"But Greece is a dangerous field for a political speculator; the imagination produces an illusion resembling the beautiful appearances which are sometimes exhibited in the Sicilian straits; the reflected images of ancient Grecian glory pass in a rapid succession before the mental eye, and, delighted with the captivating forms of greatness and splendour, we forget for a moment that the scene is in reality a naked waste."

Some people say they can distinguish between a written and a spoken style, but this

depends a good deal on the art of the speaker. Churchill could give a colloquial tone to a ready-written sentence, and could speak it with an off-hand grace, a carelessness which defied all suspicion of preparation; and the look, and pause, and precipitation — each and all came in aid of the actor's power of perfecting the illusion. If you had heard and seen him, you would have believed that, in speaking this passage, the thought of the *Fata Morgana* rose in his mind at the instant, and that, seeing it pleased you, and pleased with it himself, encouraged by your look of intelligence, and borne along by your sympathy, the eloquent man followed his own idea with a happiness more than care, admirable in conversation. A few days afterwards, Helen was very much surprised to find her admired sentence word for word in a book, from which Churchill's card fell as she opened it.

Persons without a name Horace treated as barbarians who did not know the value of their gold; and he seemed to think that if they chanced to possess rings and jewels, they might be plucked from them without remorse, and

converted to better use by some lucky civilized adventurer. Yet in his most successful piracies he was always haunted by the fear of discovery, and he especially dreaded the acute perception of Lady Davenant; he thought she suspected his arts of appropriation, and he took the first convenient opportunity of sounding her opinion on this point.

"How I enjoy," said he to Lady Cecilia, "telling a good story to you, for you never ask if it is a fact. Now, in a good story, no one sticks to absolute fact; there must be some little embellishment. No one would send his own or his friend's story into the world without 'putting a hat on its head, and a stick into its hand,'" Churchill triumphantly quoted; this time he did not steal.

"But," said Lady Davenant, "I find that even the pleasure I have in mere characteristic or humorous narration is heightened by my dependence on the truth — the character for truth — of the narrator."

Not only Horace Churchill, but almost everybody present, except Helen, confessed that they could not agree with her. The cha-

racter for truth of the story-teller had nothing to do with his story, unless it was *historique*, or that he was to swear to it.

"And even if it were *historique*," cried Horace, buoyed up at the moment by the tide in his favour, and floating out farther than was prudent—"and even if it were *historique*, how much pleasanter is graceful fiction than grim, rigid truth; and how much more amusing in my humble opinion!"

"Now," said Lady Davenant, "for instance, this book I am reading — (it was Dumont's 'Memoires de Mirabeau') — this book which I am reading, gives me infinitely increased pleasure, from my certain knowledge, my perfect conviction of the truth of the author. The self-evident nature of some of the facts would support themselves, you may say, in some instances; but my perceiving the scrupulous care he takes to say no more than what he knows to be true, my perfect reliance on the relater's private character for integrity, gives a zest to every anecdote he tells — a specific weight to every word of conversation which he repeats — appropriate value to every trait of

wit or humour characteristic of the person he describes. Without such belief, the characters would not have to me, as they now have, all the power, and charm, and life, of nature and reality. They are all now valuable as records of individual varieties that have positively so existed. While the most brilliant writer could, by fiction, have produced an effect, valuable only as representing the general average of human nature, but adding nothing to our positive knowledge, to the data from which we can reason in future."

Churchill understood Lady Davenant too well to stand quite unembarrassed as he listened; and when she went on to say how differently she should have felt in reading these memoirs if they had been written by Mirabeau himself; with all his brilliancy, all his talents, how inferior would have been her enjoyment as well as instruction! his shrinking conscience told him how this might all be applied to himself; yet, strange to say, though somewhat abashed, he was nevertheless flattered by the idea of a parallel between himself and Mira-

beau. Celebrity, notoriety, was so much more his object than honest fame.

But even in the better parts of his character, his liberality in money matters, his goodnatured patronage of rising genius, the meanness of his mind broke out. There was a certain young poetess whom he had encouraged; she happened to be sister to Mr. Mapletofft, Lord Davenant's secretary, and she had spoken with enthusiastic gratitude of Mr. Churchill's kindness. She was going to publish a volume of Sonnets under Mr. Churchill's patronage, and, as she happened to be now at some country town in the neighbourhood, he requested Lady Cecilia to allow him to introduce this young authoress to her. She was invited for a few days to Clarendon Park, and Mr. Churchill was zealous to procure subscriptions for her, and eager to lend the aid of his fashion and his literary reputation to bring forward the merits of her book. "Indeed," he whispered, "he had given her some little help in the composition," and all went well till, in an evil hour, Helen praised one of the sonnets rather too much —

more, he thought, than she had praised another, which was his own. His jealousy wakened—he began to criticise his protegée's poetry. Helen, not immediately aware of how it was with him, went on defending her admiration, and reminded him that he had himself recommended these lines to her notice.

"Well! — yes — I did say the best I could for the whole thing, and for her it is surprising — that is, I am anxious the publication should take. But if we come to compare — you know this cannot stand certain comparisons that might be made. Miss Stanley's own taste and judgment must perceive—when we talk of genius — that is quite out of the question, you know."

Horace was so perplexed between his philanthropy and his jealousy, his desire to show the one and his incapability of concealing the other, that he became unintelligible; and Helen laughed, and told him that she could not now understand what his opinion really was. She was quite ready to agree with him, she said, if he would but agree with himself: this made him disagree still more with

himself and unluckily with his better self, his benevolence quite gave way before his jealousy and ill-humour, and he vented it upon the book, and, instead of prophecies of its success, he now groaned over "sad careless lines,"—"passages that lead to nothing,"—"similes that will not hold when you come to examine them."

Helen pointed out in the dedication a pretty, a happy thought.

Horace smiled, and confessed that was his own.

What! in the dedication to himself?——and in the blindness of his vanity he did not immediately see the absurdity.

The more he felt himself in the wrong, of course the more angry he grew, and it finished by his renouncing the dedication altogether, declaring he would have none of it. The book and the lady might find a better patron.

There are things which no man of real generosity could say or do, or think, put him in ever so great a passion. He would not be harsh to an inferior—a woman—a protegée on

whom he had conferred obligations; but Mr. Churchill was harsh — he showed neither generosity nor feeling, and Helen's good opinion of him sank to rise no more.

Of this, however, he had not enough of the sympathy or penetration of feeling to be aware.

CHAPTER III.

THE party now at Clarendon Park was chiefly of young people. Among them were two cousins of Lady Cecilia's, whom Helen had known at Cecilhurst before they went abroad, while she was still almost a child. Lady Katrine Hawksby, the elder, was several years older than Cecilia. When Helen last saw her, she was tolerably well-looking, very fashionable, and remarkable for high spirits, with a love for *quizzing* and for all that is vulgarly called *fun*, and a talent for ridicule, which she indulged at everybody's expense. She had always amused Cecilia, who thought her more diverting than really ill-natured; but Helen thought her more ill-natured than diverting, never liked her, and had her own private reasons for thinking that she was no good friend to Cecilia: but now, in

consequence either of the wear and tear of London life, or of a disappointment in love or matrimony, she had lost the fresh plumpness of youth; and gone too was that spirit of mirth, if not of good-humour, which used to enliven her countenance. Thin and sallow, the sharp features remained, and the sarcastic without the arch expression; still she had a very fashionable air. Her pretensions to youth, as her dress shewed, were not gone; and her hope of matrimony, though declining, not set. Her many-years younger sister, Louisa, now Lady Castlefort, was beautiful. As a girl, she had been the most sentimental, refined, delicate creature conceivable; always talking poetry — and so romantic — with such a soft, sweet, die-away voice — lips apart — and such fine eyes, that could so ecstatically turn up to heaven, or be so cast down, charmingly fixed in contemplation:— and now she is married, just the same. There she is, established in the library at Clarendon Park, with the most sentimental fashionable novel of the day, beautifully bound, on the little rose-wood table beside her, and a manuscript poem, a great secret, "Love's Last

Sigh," in her bag with her smelling-bottle and embroidered handkerchief; and on that beautiful arm she leaned so gracefully, with her soft languishing expression: so perfectly dressed, too—handsomer than ever.

Helen was curious to know what sort of man Lady Louisa had married, for she recollected that no hero of any novel that ever was read, or talked of came up to her idea of what a hero ought to be, of what a man must be, whom she could ever think of loving. Cecilia told Helen that she had seen Lord Castlefort, but that he was not Lord Castlefort or likely to be Lord Castlefort, at that time; and she bade her guess, among all she could recollect having ever seen at Cecilhurst, who the man of Louisa's choice could be. Lady Katrine, with infinite forbearance, smiled, and gave no hint, while Helen guessed and guessed in vain. She could hardly believe her senses when she saw him come into the room. He was a little deformed man, for whom Lady Louisa had always expressed to her companions a peculiar abhorrence. He had that look of conceit which unfortunately sometimes accom-

panies personal deformity, and which disgusts even Pity's self. Lord Castlefort was said to have declared himself made for love and fighting! Helen remembered that kind-hearted Cecilia had often remonstrated for humanity's sake, and stopped the quizzing which used to go on in their private coteries, when the satirical elder sister would have it that *le petit bossu* was in love with Louisa.

But what *could* make her marry him? Was there anything within to make amends for the exterior? Nothing — nothing that could "rid him of the lump behind." But superior to the metamorphoses of love, or of fairy tale, are the metamorphoses of fortune. Fortune had suddenly advanced him to uncounted thousands and a title, and no longer *le petit bossu*, Lord Castlefort obtained the fair hand — the very fair hand of Lady Louisa Hawksby, *plus belle que fée!*

Still Helen could not believe that Louisa had married him voluntarily; but Lady Cecilia assured her that it was voluntarily, quite voluntarily. "You could not have so doubted had you seen the *trousseau* and the *cor-*

beille, for you know, ' *Le present fait oublier le futur* ' "

Helen could scarcely smile.

" But Louisa had feeling—really some," continued Lady Cecilia; " but she could not afford to follow it. She had got into such debt, I really do not know what she would have done if Lord Castlefort had not proposed; but she has some little heart, and I could tell you a secret; but no, I will leave you the pleasure of finding it out."

" It will be no pleasure to me," said Helen.

" I never saw anybody so out of spirits," cried Lady Cecilia laughing, " at another's unfortunate marriage, which all the time she thinks very fortunate. She is quite happy, and even Katrine does not laugh at him any longer, it is to be supposed; it is no laughing matter now."

" No indeed," said Helen.

" Nor a crying matter either," said Cecilia. " Do not look shocked at me, my dear, I did not do it; but so many do, and I have seen it so often, that I cannot wonder with such a foolish face of blame—I do believe, my dear

Helen, that you are envious because Louisa is married before you! for shame, my love! Envy is a naughty passion, you know our Madame Bonne used to say; but here 's mamma, now talk to her about Louisa Castlefort, pray."

Lady Davenant took the matter with great coolness, was neither shocked nor surprised at this match, she had known so many worse; Lord Castlefort, as well as she recollected, was easy enough to live with. "And after all," said she, "it is better than what we see every day, the fairest of the fair knowingly, willingly giving themselves to the most profligate of the profligate. In short, the market is so overstocked with accomplished young ladies on the one hand, and on the other, men find wives and establishments so expensive, clubs so cheap and so much more luxurious than any home, liberty not only so sweet, but so fashionable, that their policy, their maxim is, 'Marry not at all, or if marriage be ultimately necessary to pay debts and leave heirs to good names, marry as late as possible;' and thus the two parties with their opposite interests stand at bay, or try to

outwit or outbargain each other. And if you wish for the moral of the whole affair, here it is: from the vulgar nursery-maids, with their broad sense and bad English, and the good or bad French of the governess, to the elegant innuendo of the drawing-room, all is working to the same effect: dancing-masters, music-masters, and all the tribe, what is it all for, but to prepare young ladies for the grand event; and to raise in them, besides the natural, a factitious, an abstract idea of good in being married! Every girl in these days is early impressed with the idea that she must be married, that she cannot be happy unmarried. Here is an example of what I meant the other day by strength of mind; it requires some strength of mind to be superior to such a foolish, vain, and vulgar belief."

"It will require no great strength of mind in me," said Helen, "for I really never have formed such notions. They never were early put into my head; my uncle always said a woman might be very happy unmarried. I do not think I shall ever be seized with a terror of dying an old maid."

"You are not come to the time yet, my dear," said Lady Davenant smiling. "Look at Lady Katrine: strength of mind on this one subject would have saved her from being a prey to envy, and jealousy, and all the vulture passions of the mind."

"In the old French *régime*," continued Lady Davenant, "the young women were at least married safely out of their convents; but our young ladies, with their heads full of high-flown poetry and sentimental novels, are taken out into the world before marriage, expected to see and not to choose, shewn the most agreeable, and expected, doomed to marry the most odious. But, in all these marriages for establishment, the wives who have least feeling are not only likely to be the happiest, but also most likely to conduct themselves well. In the first place they do not begin with falsehood. If they have no hearts, they cannot pretend to give any to the husband, and that is better than having given them to somebody else. Husband and wife, in this case, clearly understand the terms of agreement, expect, imagine

no more than they have, and jog-trot they go on together to the end of life very comfortably."

"Comfortably!" exclaimed Helen, "it must be most miserable."

"Not most miserable, Helen," said Lady Davenant, "keep your pity for others; keep your sighs for those who need them—for the heart which no longer dares to utter a sigh for itself, the faint heart that dares to love, but dares not abide by its choice. Such infatuated creatures, with the roots of feeling left aching within them, must take what opiates they can find; and in after-life, through all their married existence, their prayer must be for indifference, and thankful may they be if that prayer is granted."

These words recurred to Helen that evening, when Lady Castlefort sang some tender and passionate airs; played on the harp with a true Saint Cecilia air and attitude; and at last, with charming voice and touching expression, sung her favourite — "Too late for redress."

Both Mr. Churchill and Beauclerc were

among the group of gentlemen; neither was a stranger to her. Mr. Churchill admired and applauded as a connoisseur. Beauclerc listened in silence. Mr. Churchill entreated for more—more—and named several of *his* favourite Italian airs. Her ladyship really could not. But the slightest indication of a wish from Beauclerc, was, without turning towards him, heard and attended to, as her sister failed not to remark and to make others remark.

Seizing a convenient pause while Mr. Churchill was searching for some master-piece, Lady Katrine congratulated her sister on having recovered her voice, and declared that she had never heard her play or sing since she was married till to-night.

"You may consider it as a very particular compliment, I assure you," continued she, addressing herself so particularly to Mr. Beauclerc that he could not help being a little out of countenance, — "I have so begged and prayed, but she was never in voice or humour, or heart, or something. Yesterday, even Castlefort was almost on his knees for a song, —were not you, Lord Castlefort?"

Lord Castlefort pinched his pointed chin, and, casting up an angry look, replied in a dissonant voice,—" I do not remember !"

" *Tout voir, tout entendre, tout oublier*," whispered Lady Katrine to Mr. Churchill, as she stooped to assist him in the search for a music-book — " *Tout voir, tout entendre, tout oublier*, should be the motto adopted by all married people."

Lady Castlefort seemed distressed, and turned over the leaves in such a flutter that she could not find anything, and she rose, in spite of all entreaties, leaving the place to her sister, who was, she said, " so much better a musician, and not so foolishly nervous." Lady Castlefort said her " voice always went away when she was at all——"

There it ended as far as words went; but she sighed, and retired so gracefully, that all the gentlemen pitied her.

There is one moment in which ill-nature sincerely repents — the moment when it sees pity felt for its victim.

Horace followed Lady Castlefort to the ottoman, on which she sank. Beauclerc remained

leaning on the back of Lady Katrine's chair, but without seeming to hear what she said or sung. After some time Mr. Churchill, not finding his attentions well received, or weary of paying them, quitted Lady Castlefort, and sat down by Helen; and, in a voice to be heard by her, but by no one else, he said—

"What a relief!—I thought I should never get away!" Then, favoured by a loud bravura of Lady Katrine's, he went on—"That beauty, between you and me, is something of a bore—she—I don't mean the lady who is now screaming—she should always sing. Heaven blessed her with song, not sense—but here one is made so fastidious!"

He sighed, and for some moments seemed to be given up to the duet which Lady Katrine and an officer were performing; and then exclaimed, but so that Helen only could hear,—"Merciful Heaven! how often one wishes one had no ears: that Captain Jones must be the son of Stentor, and that lady!—if angels sometimes saw themselves in a looking-glass when singing—there would be peace upon earth."

Helen, not liking to be the secret receiver of his contraband good things, was rising to change her place, when, softly detaining her, he said, " Do not be afraid, no danger — trust me, for I have studied under Talma."

" What can you mean ?"

" I mean," continued he, " that Talma taught me the secret of his dying scenes — how every syllable of his dying words might be heard to the furthest part of the audience; and I — give me credit for my ingenuity — know how, by reversing the art, to be perfectly inaudible at ten paces' distance, and yet, I trust, perfectly intelligible, always, to you."

Helen now rose decidedly, and retreated to a table at the other side of the room, and turned over some books that lay there — she took up a volume of the novel Lady Castlefort had been reading — " Love unquestionable." She was surprised to find it instantly, gently, but decidedly drawn from her hand: she looked up —it was Beauclerc.

" I beg your pardon, Miss Stanley, but——"

" Thank you! thank you!" said Helen; " you need not beg my pardon."

This was the first time Beauclerc had spoken in his friendly, cordial, natural manner, to her, since their incomprehensible misunderstanding. She was heartily glad it was over, and that he was come to himself again. And now they conversed very happily together for some time; though what they said might not be particularly worth recording. Lady Katrine was at Helen's elbow before she perceived her, "looking for her sac;" and Lady Castlefort came for her third volume, and, gliding off, wished to all—"*Felice, felicissimo notte.*"

Neither of these sisters had ever liked Helen; she was too true for the one, and too good-natured for the other. Lady Katrine had always, even when she was quite a child, been jealous of Lady Cecilia's affection for Helen; and now her indignation and disappointment were great at finding her established at Clarendon Park — to live with the Clarendons, to *go out* with Lady Cecilia. Now, it had been the plan of both sisters, that Lady Katrine's present visit should be eternal. How they would ever have managed to fasten her ladyship upon the General, even if Helen had been

out of the question, need not now be considered. Their disappointment and dislike to Helen were as great as if she had been the only obstacle to the fulfilment of their scheme.

These two sisters had never agreed ——

——— " Doomed by Fate
To live in all the elegance of hate ;"

and since Lady Castlefort's marriage, the younger, the beautiful being now the successful lady of the ascendant, the elder writhed in all the combined miseries of jealousy and dependence, and an everyday lessening chance of bettering her condition. Lord Castlefort, too, for good reasons of his own, well remembered, detested Lady Katrine, and longed to shake her off. In this wish, at least, husband and wife united; but Lady Castlefort had no decent excuse for her ardent impatience to get rid of her sister. She had magnificent houses in town and country, ample room everywhere—but in her heart. She had the smallest heart conceivable, and the coldest; but had it been ever so large, or ever so warm, Lady Katrine was surely not the person to get into it, or into any heart, male or female: there was the despair. " If

Katrine was but married — Mr. Churchill, suppose?"

Faint was the *suppose* in Lady Castlefort's imagination. Not so the hope which rose in Lady Katrine's mind the moment she saw him here. "How fortunate!" Her ladyship had now come to that no particular age, when a remarkable metaphysical phenomenon occurs: on one particular subject hope increases as all probability of success decreases. This aberration of intellect is usually observed to be greatest in very clever women; while Mr. Churchill, the flattered object of her present hope, knew how to manage with great innocence and modesty, and draw her on to overt acts of what is called flirtation.

Rousseau says that a man is always awkward and miserable when placed between two women to whom he is making love. But Rousseau had never seen Mr. Churchill, and had but an imperfect idea of the dexterity, the ambiguity, that in our days can be successfully practised by an accomplished male coquette. Absolutely to blind female jealousy may be

beyond his utmost skill; but it is easy, as every day's practice shews, to keep female vanity pleasantly perplexed by ocular deception — to make her believe that what she really sees she does not see, and that what is unreal is reality: to make her, to the amusement of the spectators, continually stretch out her hand to snatch the visionary good that for ever eludes her grasp, or changes, on near approach, to grinning mockery.

This delightful game was now commenced with Lady Katrine, and if Helen could be brought to take a snatch, it would infinitely increase the interest and amusement of the lookers-on. Of this, however, there seemed little chance; but the evil eye of envy was set upon her, and the demon of jealousy was longing to work her woe.

Lady Castlefort saw with scornful astonishment that Mr. Beauclerc's eyes, sometimes when she was speaking, when she was singing, would stray to that part of the room where Miss Stanley might be; and when she was speaking to him, he was wonderfully absent.

Her ladyship rallied him, while Lady Katrine, looking on, cleared her throat in her horrid way, and longed for an opportunity to discomfit Helen, which supreme pleasure her ladyship promised herself upon the first convenient occasion,— convenient meaning when Lady Davenant was out of the room, for Lady Katrine, though urged by prompting jealousy, dared not attack her when under cover of that protection. From long habit, even her sarcastic nature stood in awe of a certain power of moral indignation, which had at times flashed upon her, and of which she had a sort of superstitious dread, as of an incomprehensible, incalculable power.

But temper will get the better of all prudence. Piqued by some little preference which Lady Cecilia had shewn to Helen's taste in the choice of the colour of a dress, an occasion offered of signalizing her revenge, which could not be resisted. It was a question to be publicly decided, whether blue, green, or white should be adopted for the ladies' uniform at an approaching *fête*. She was deputed to collect the votes. All the company were

assembled; Lady Davenant, out of the circle, as it was a matter that concerned her not, was talking to the gentlemen apart.

Lady Katrine went round canvassing. "Blue, green, or white? say blue, *pray*." But when she came to Helen, she made a full stop, asked no question — preferred no prayer, but after fixing attention by her pause, said, "I need not ask Miss Stanley's vote or opinion, as I know my cousin's, and with Miss Stanley it is always 'I say ditto to Lady Cecilia;' therefore, to save trouble, I always count two for Cecilia — one for herself and one for her *double*."

"Right, Lady Katrine Hawksby," cried a voice from afar, which made her start; "you are quite right to consider Helen Stanley as my daughter's double, for my daughter loves and esteems her as her second self — her better self. In this sense Helen is Lady Cecilia's double, but if you mean——"

"Bless me! I don't know what I meant, I declare. I could not have conceived that Lady Davenant —— Miss Stanley, I beg a thousand million of pardons."

Helen, with anxious good-nature, pardoned before she was asked, and hastened to pass on to the business of the day, but Lady Davenant would not so let it pass; her eye still fixed, she pursued the quailing enemy — "One word more. In justice to my daughter, I must say, her love has not been won by flattery, as none knows better than the Lady Katrine Hawksby."

The unkindest cut of all, and on the tenderest part. Lady Katrine could not stand it. Conscious and trembling, she broke through the circle, fled into the conservatory, and, closing the doors behind her, would not be followed by Helen, Cecilia, or any body.

Lady Castlefort sighed, and, first breaking the silence that ensued, said, "'Tis such a pity that Katrine will always so let her wit run away with her — it brings her so continually into —— for my part, in all humility I must confess, I can't help thinking that, what with its being unfeminine and altogether so incompatible with what in general is thought amiable—I cannot but consider wit in a woman as a real misfortune. What say the gentlemen?

they must decide, gentlemen being always the best judges."

With an appealing tone of interrogation she gracefully looked up to the gentlemen; and, after a glance towards Granville Beauclerc, unluckily unnoticed or unanswered, her eyes expected reply from Horace Churchill. He, well feeling the predicament in which he stood, between a fool and a *femme d'esprit*, answered, with his ambiguous smile, "that no doubt it was a great misfortune to have '*plus d'esprit qu'on ne sait mêner*'"

"This is a misfortune," said Lady Davenant, "that may be deplored for a great genius once in an age, but is really rather of uncommon occurrence. People complain of wit where, nine times in ten, poor wit is quite innocent; but such is the consequence of having kept bad company. Wit and ill-nature having been too often found together, when we see one we expect the other; and such an inseparable false association has been formed, that half the world take it for granted that there is wit if they do but see ill-nature."

At this moment Mr. Maplelofft, the secretary,

entered, with his face full of care and his hands full of papers. Lady Katrine needed not to feign or feel any further apprehensions of Lady Davenant; for, an hour afterwards, it was announced that Lord and Lady Davenant were obliged to set off for town immediately. In the midst of her hurried preparations Lady Davenant found a moment to comfort Helen with the assurance that, whatever happened, she would see her again. It might end in Lord Davenant's embassy being given up. At all events she would see her again — she hoped in a few weeks, perhaps in a few days. "So no leave-takings, my dear child, and no tears—it is best as it is. On my return let me find——"

"Lord Davenant's waiting, my lady," and she hurried away.

CHAPTER IV

ABSENT or present, the guardian influence of a superior friend is one of the greatest blessings on earth, and after Lady Davenant's departure Helen was so full of all she had said to her, and of all that she would approve or disapprove, that every action, almost every thought, was under the influence of her friend's mind. Continually she questioned her motives as well as examined her actions, and, while she was thus "justice to herself severe," she could not but condemn some of her conduct, or if not her conduct, her manner, towards Horace Churchill; she had been flattered by his admiration, and had permitted his attentions more than she ought, when her own mind was perfectly made up as to his character. Ever since the affair of the poetess, she had been convinced that she could never make the hap-

piness or redeem the character of one so mean.

According to the ladies' code, a woman is never to understand that a gentleman's attentions mean anything more than common civility; she is supposed never to see his mind, however he may make it visible, till he declares it in words. But, as Helen could not help understanding his manner, she thought it was but fair to make him understand her by her manner. She was certain that if he were once completely convinced, not only that he had not made any impression, but that he never could make any impression, on her heart, his pursuit would cease. His vanity, mortified, might revenge itself upon her, perhaps; but this was a danger which she thought she ought to brave; and now she resolved to be quite sincere, as she said to herself, at whatever hazard (probably meaning at the hazard of displeasing Cecilia) she would make her own sentiments clear, and put an end to Mr. Churchill's ambiguous conduct: and this should be done on the very first opportunity.

An opportunity soon occurred — Horace had

a beautiful little topaz ring with which Lady Katrine Hawksby fell into raptures; such a charming device!—Cupid and Momus making the world their plaything.

It was evident that Lady Katrine expected that the seal should be presented to her. Besides being extravagantly fond of baubles, she desired to have this homage from Horace. To her surprise and mortification, however, he was only quite flattered by her approving of his taste:—it was his favourite seal, and so "he kept the topaz, and the rogue was bit."

Lady Katrine was the more mortified by this failure, because it was witnessed by many of the company, among whom, when she looked round, she detected smiles of provoking intelligence. Soon afterwards the dressing-bell rang, and she quitted the room; one after another every one dropped off, except Helen, who was finishing a letter, and Horace, who stood on the hearth playing with his seal. When she came to sealing-time, he approached and besought her to honour him by the acceptance of this little seal. "If he could obliterate Momus—if he could leave only Cupid,

it would be more appropriate. But it was a device invented for him by a French friend, and he hoped she would pardon his folly, and think only of his love!"

This was said so that it might pass either for mere jest or for earnest; his look expressed very sentimental love, and Helen seized the moment to explain herself decidedly.

It was a surprise — a great surprise to Mr. Churchill, a severe disappointment, not only to his vanity but to his heart, for he had one. It was some comfort, however, that he had not quite committed himself, and he recovered—even in the moment of disappointment he recovered himself time enough dexterously to turn the tables upon Helen.

He thanked her for her candour — for her great care of his happiness, in anticipating a danger which might have been so fatal to him; but he really was not aware that he had said anything which required so serious an answer.

Afterwards he amused himself with Lady Katrine at Miss Stanley's expense, representing himself as in the most pitiable case of

Rejected Addresses — rejected before he had offered. He had only been guilty of Folly, and he was brought in guilty of Love.

Poor Helen had to endure not only this persiflage, which was soon made to reach her ear, but also the reproaches of Lady Cecilia, who said, "I should have warned you, Helen, not to irritate that man's relentless vanity; now you see the consequences."

"But, after all, what harm can he do me?" thought Helen. "It is very disagreeable to be laughed at, but still my conscience is satisfied, and that is a happiness that will last; all the rest will soon be over. I am sure I did the thing awkwardly, but I am glad it is done."

Mr. Churchill soon afterwards received an invitation — a command to join a royal party now at some watering-place; an illustrious person could not live another day without Horace *le desiré*. He shewed the note, and acted despair at being compelled to go, and then he departed. To the splendid party he went, and drowned all recollections of whatever love he had felt in the fresh intoxication of

vanity — a diurnal stimulus which, however degrading, and he did feel it degrading, was now become necessary to his existence.

His departure from Clarendon Park was openly regretted by Lady Cecilia, while Lady Katrine secretly mourned over the downfall of her projects, and Beauclerc attempted not to disguise his satisfaction.

He was all life and love, and would then certainly have declared his passion, but for an extraordinary change which now appeared in Helen's manner towards him. It seemed unaccountable; it could not be absolute caprice, she did not even treat him as a friend, and she evidently avoided explanation. He thought, and thought, and came as near the truth without touching it as possible. He concluded that she had understood his joy at Churchill's departure; that she now clearly perceived his attachment; and was determined against him. Not having the slightest idea that she considered him as a married man, he could not even guess the nature of her feelings.

And all the time Helen did not well understand herself; she began to be extremely alarm-

ed at her own feelings — to dread that there was something not quite right. Could it be wrong, very wrong in her mind? This dread had come and gone by fits. This suspicion was first raised by the remarks excited by a slight circumstance which occurred about this time. Her white dove, Beauclerc's gift, was found one morning drowned in the marble vase in which it went to drink. Helen was very sorry — that was surely natural; but she was wonderfully concerned, Lady Katrine scoffingly said; and before everybody, before Beauclerc, worse than all, her ladyship represented to the best of her ability the attitude in which she had found Helen mourning over her misfortune, the dove in her hand pressed close to her bosom —"And in tears—absolutely." She would swear to the tears.

Helen blushed, tried to laugh, and acknowledged it was very foolish. Well, that passed off as only foolish, and she did not at first feel that it was a thing much to be ashamed of in any other way. But she was sorry that Beauclerc was by when Lady Katrine mimicked her; most sorry that he should think her

foolish. But then did he? His looks expressed tenderness. He was very tender-hearted. Really manly men always are so; and so she observed to Lady Cecilia. Lady Katrine heard the observation and smiled—her odious smile—implying more than words could say. Helen was not quite clear, however, what it meant to say.

Some days afterwards Lady Katrine took up a book, in which Helen's name was written in Beauclerc's hand. "*Gage d'amitié?*" said her ladyship; and she walked up and down the room, humming the air of an old French song: interrupting herself now and then to ask her sister if she could recollect the words. "The *refrain*, if I remember right, is something like this—

> Sous le nom d'amitié — sous le nom d'amitié,
> La moitié du monde trompe l'autre moitié,
> Sous le nom, sous le nom, sous le nom d'amitié.

"And it ends with

> Sous le nom d'amitié, Damon, je vous adore,
> Sous le nom, sous le nom d'amitié.

"Miss Stanley do you know that song?" concluded her malicious ladyship.

No — Miss Stanley had never heard it before; but the marked emphasis with which Lady Katrine sung and looked, made Helen clear that she meant to apply the words tauntingly to her and Beauclerc, — but which of them her ladyship suspected was cheating or cheated — "*sous le nom d'amitié*," she did not know. All was confusion in her mind. After a moment's cooler reflection, however, she was certain it could not be Beauclerc who was to blame — it must be herself, and she now very much wished that everybody, and Lady Katrine in particular, should know that Mr. Beauclerc was engaged — almost married; if this were but known, it would put an end to all such imputations.

The first time she could speak to Cecilia on the subject, she begged to know how soon Mr. Beauclerc's engagement would be declared. Lady Cecilia slightly answered she could not tell — and when Helen pressed the question she asked,

"Why are you so anxious, Helen?"

Helen honestly told her, and Lady Cecilia only laughed at her for minding what Lady

Katrine said, — "When you know yourself, Helen, how it is, what can it signify what mistakes others may make?"

But Helen grew more and more uneasy, for she was not clear that she did know how it was, with herself at least. Her conscience faltered, and she was not sure whether she was alarmed with or without reason. She began to compare feelings that she had read of, and feelings that she had seen in others, and feelings that were new to herself, and in this maze and mist nothing was distinct — much was magnified — all alarming.

One day Beauclerc was within view of the windows on horseback, on a very spirited horse, which he managed admirably; but a shot fired suddenly in an adjoining preserve so startled the horse, that it——oh! what it did Helen did not see, she was so terrified:—and why was she so much terrified? She excused herself by saying it was natural to be frightened for any human creature. But, on the other hand, Tom Isdall was a human creature, and she had seen him last week actually thrown from his horse, and had not felt much concern. But then he

was not a friend; and he fell into a soft ditch; and there was something ridiculous in it which prevented people from caring about it.

With such nice casuistry she went on pretty well; and besides, she was so innocent — so ignorant, that it was easy for her to be deceived. She went on, telling herself that she loved Beauclerc as a brother — as she loved the General. But when she came to comparisons, she could not but perceive a difference. Her heart never bounded on the General's appearance, let him appear ever so suddenly, as it did one day when Beauclerc returned unexpectedly from Old Forest. Her whole existence seemed so altered by his approach, his presence, or his absence. Why was this? Was there any thing wrong in it? To that question it now came continually. She had nobody whose judgment she could consult — nobody to whom she could venture to describe her feelings, or lay open her doubts and scruples. Lady Cecilia would only laugh; and she could not quite trust either her judgment or her sincerity, though she knew her affection. Besides, after what Cecilia had said of

her being safe; after all she had told her of Beauclerc's engagement, how astonished and shocked Cecilia would be!

Then Helen resolved that she would keep as strict a watch over herself, and repress all emotion, and be severe with her own mind to the utmost; and it was upon this resolution that she had changed her manner, without knowing how much, towards Beauclerc; she was certain he meant nothing but friendship. It was her fault if she felt too much pleasure in his company; the same things were, as she wisely argued, right or wrong according to the intention with which they were said, done, looked, or felt. Rigidly she inflicted on herself the penance of avoiding his delightful society, and to make sure that she did not try to attract, she repelled him with all her power—thought she never could make herself cold, and stiff, and disagreeable enough to satisfy her conscience.

Then she grew frightened at Beauclerc's looks of astonishment—feared he would ask explanation—avoided him more and more. Then, on the other hand, she feared he might

guess and interpret *wrong*, or rather *right*, this change; and back she changed, tried in vain to keep the just medium — she had lost the power of measuring — altogether she was very unhappy, and so was Beauclerc; he found her incomprehensible, and thought her capricious. His own mind was fluttered with love, so that he could not see or judge distinctly, else he might have seen the truth; and sometimes, though free from conceit, he did hope it might be all love. But why then so determined to discourage him? he had advanced sufficiently to mark his intentions, she could not doubt his sincerity. He would see farther before he ventured farther. He thought a man was a fool who proposed before he had tolerable reason to believe he should not be refused.

Lord Beltravers and his sisters were now expected at Old Forest immediately, and Beauclerc went thither early every morning, to press forward the preparations for the arrival of the family, and he seldom returned till dinner-time; and every evening Lady Castlefort contrived to take possession of him. It

appeared to be indeed as much against his will as it could be between a well-bred man and a high-bred belle; but to do her bidding seemed, if not a moral, at least a polite necessity. She had been spoiled, she owned, by foreign attentions, not French, for that is all gone now at Paris, but Italian manners, which she so much preferred. She did not know how she could live out of Italy, and she must convince Lord Castlefort that the climate was necessary for her health. Meanwhile she adopted, she acted, what she conceived to be foreign manners, and with an exaggeration common with those who have very little sense and a vast desire to be fashionable with a certain set. Those who knew her best (all but her sister Katrine, who shook her head,) were convinced that there was really no harm in Lady Castlefort, "only vanity and folly." How frequently folly leads farther than fools *ever*, or wise people *often* foresee, we need not here stop to record. On the present occasion, all at Clarendon Park, even those most inclined to scandal, persons who, by the by, may be always known by their invariable preface of, "I hate

all scandal," agreed that no one *so far* could behave better than Granville Beauclerc—"so far,"—"as yet." But all the elderly who had any experience of this world, all the young who had any intuitive prescience in these matters, could not but fear that things could not long go on as they were now going. It was sadly to be feared that so young a man, and so very handsome a man, and such an admirer of beauty, and grace, and music, and of such an enthusiastic temper, must be in danger of being drawn on farther than he was aware, and before he knew what he was about.

The General heard and saw all that went on without seeming to take heed, only once he asked Cecilia how long she thought her cousins would stay. She did not know, but she said "she saw he wished them to be what they were not—cousins once removed—and quite agreed with him." He smiled, for a man is always well pleased to find his wife agree with him in disliking her cousins.

One night—one fine moonlight night—Lady Castlefort, standing at the conservatory door with Beauclerc, after talking an inconceivable

quantity of nonsense about her passion for the moon, and her notions about the stars, and congenial souls born under the same planet, proposed to him a moonlight walk.

The General was at the time playing at chess with Helen, and had the best of the game, but at that moment he made a false move, was check-mated, rose hastily, threw the men together on the board, and forgot to regret his shameful defeat, or to compliment Helen upon her victory. Lady Castlefort, having just discovered that the fatality nonsense about the stars would not quite do for Beauclerc, had been the next instant seized with a sudden passion for astronomy; she must see those charming rings of Saturn, which she had heard so much of, which the General was shewing Miss Stanley the other night; she must beg him to lend his telescope; she came up with her sweetest smile to trouble the General for his glass. Lord Castlefort, following, objected strenuously to her going out at night; she had been complaining of a bad cold when he wanted her to walk in the daytime, she would only make it worse by going out in the night air. If she

wanted to see Saturn and his rings, the General, he was sure, would fix a telescope at the window for her.

But that would not do, she must have a moonlight walk; she threw open the conservatory door, beckoned to Mr. Beauclerc, and how it ended Helen did not stay to see. She thought that she ought not even to think on the subject, and she went away as fast as she could. It was late, and she went to bed wishing to be up early, to go on with a drawing she was to finish for Mrs. Collingwood — a view by the river side, that view which had struck her fancy as so beautiful the day she went first to Old Forest. Early the next morning—and a delightful morning it was—she was up and out, and reached the spot from which her sketch was taken. She was surprised to find her little camp-stool, which she had looked for in vain in the hall, in its usual place, set here ready for her, and on it a pencil nicely cut.

Beauclerc must have done this. But he was not in general an early riser. However, she concluded that he had gone over thus early to Old Forest, to see his friend Lord Beltravers,

who was to have arrived the day before, with his sisters. She saw a boat rowing down the river, and she had no doubt he was gone. But just as she had settled to her drawing, she heard the joyful bark of Beauclerc's dog Nelson, who came bounding towards her, and the next moment his master appeared, coming down the path from the wood. With quick steps he came till he was nearly close to her, then slackened his pace.

"Good morning!" said Helen; she tried to speak with composure, but her heart beat — she could not help feeling surprise at seeing him —but it was only surprise.

"I thought you were gone to Old Forest?" said she.

"Not yet," said he.

His voice sounded different from usual, and she saw in him some suppressed agitation. She endeavoured to keep her own manner unembarrassed — she thanked him for the nicely-cut pencil, and the exactly well-placed seat. He advanced a step or two nearer, stooped, and looked close at her drawing, but he

did not seem to see or know what he was looking at.

At this moment Nelson, who had been too long unnoticed, put up one paw on Miss Stanley's arm, unseen by his master, and encouraged by such gentle reproof as Helen gave, his audacious paw was on the top of her drawing-book the next moment, and the next was upon the drawing — and the paw was wet with dew. — "Nelson!" exclaimed his master, in an angry tone.

"O do not scold him," cried Helen, "do not punish him; the drawing is not spoiled — only wet, and it will be as well as ever when it is dry."

Beauclerc ejaculated something about the temper of an angel while she patted Nelson's penitent head.

"As the drawing must be left to dry," said Beauclerc, "perhaps Miss Stanley would do me the favour to walk as far as the landing-place, where the boat is to meet me — to take me — if — if I MUST go to Old Forest!" and he sighed.

She took his offered arm and walked on — surprised — confused ; — wondering what he meant by that sigh and that look—and that strong emphasis on *must*. " If I *must* go to Old Forest." Was not it a pleasure ? — was it not his own choice ? — what could he mean ? — What could be the matter ?"

A vague agitating idea rose in her mind, but she put it from her, and they walked on for some minutes, both silent. They entered the wood, and feeling the silence awkward, and afraid that he should perceive her embarrassment, and that he should suspect her suspicion, she exerted herself to speak—to say something, no matter what.

" It is a charming morning !"

After a pause of absence of mind, he answered,

" Charming ! — very !"

Then stopping short, he fixed his eyes upon Helen with an expression that she was afraid to understand. It could hardly bear any interpretation but one — and yet that was impossible — ought to be impossible — from a man in Beauclerc's circumstances — engaged

— almost a married man, as she had been told to consider him. She did not know at this moment what to think—still she thought she must mistake him, and she should be excessively ashamed of such a mistake, and now more strongly felt the dread that he should see and misinterpret or interpret too rightly her emotion; she walked on quicker, and her breath grew short, and her colour heightened. He saw her agitation— a delighful hope arose in his mind. It was plain she was not indifferent—he looked at her, but dared not look long enough—feared that he was mistaken. But the embarrassment seemed to change its character even as he looked, and now it was more like displeasure—decidedly, she appeared displeased. And so she was; for she thought now that he must either be trifling with her, or, if serious, must be acting most dishonourably; — her good opinion of him must be destroyed for ever if, as now it seemed, he wished to make an impression upon her heart — yet still she tried not to think, not to see it. She was sorry, she was very wrong to let such an idea into her mind—and still her agitation increased.

Quick as she turned from him these thoughts passed in her mind, alternately angry and ashamed, and at last, forcing herself to be composed, telling herself she ought to see farther, and at least to be certain before she condemned him —condemned so kind, so honourable a friend, while the fault might be all her own ; she now, in a softened tone, as if begging pardon for the pain she had given, and the injustice she had done him, said some words, insignificant in themselves, but from the voice of kindness charming to Beauclerc's ear and soul.

" Are not we walking very fast ?" said she, breathless. She now feared she must have said something more than she intended, and that she had betrayed feelings too much softened. He slackened his pace instantly, and with a delighted look, while she, in a hurried voice, added, " But do not let me delay you. There is the boat. You must be in haste — impatient !"

" In haste ! impatient ! to leave you, Helen !" She blushed deeper than he had ever seen her blush before. Beauclerc in general knew—

" Which blush was anger's, which was love's !"

—But now he was so much moved, he could not decide at the first glance: at the second, there was no doubt; it was anger — not love. Her arm was withdrawn from his. He was afraid he had gone too far. He had called her Helen!

He begged pardon, half humbly, half proudly. " I beg pardon; Miss Stanley I should have said. I see I have offended. I fear I have been presumptuous, but Lady Davenant taught me to trust to Miss Stanley's sincerity, and I was encouraged by her expressions of confidence and friendship."

" Friendship! Oh, yes! Mr. Beauclerc," said Helen, in a hurried voice, eagerly seizing on and repeating the word friendship; " yes, I have always considered you as a friend. I am sure I shall always find you a sincere, good friend."

" Friend!" he repeated, in a disappointed tone — all his hopes sunk. She took his arm again, and he was displeased even with that. She was not the being of real sensibility he had fancied — she was not capable of a real love.

So vacillated his heart and his imagination, and so quarrelled he alternately every instant with her and with himself. He could not understand her, or decide what he should next do or say himself; and there was the boat nearing the land, and they were going on, on, towards it in silence. He sighed.

It was a sigh that could not but be heard and noticed; it was not meant to be noticed, and yet it was. What could she think of it? She could not believe that Beauclerc meant to act treacherously. This time she was determined not to take any thing for granted, not to be so foolish as she had been with Mr. Churchill.

"Is not that your boat that I see, rowing close?"

"Yes, I believe—certainly. Yes," said he.

But now the vacillation of Beauclerc's mind suddenly ceased. Desperate, he stopped her, as she would have turned down that path to the landing-place where the boat was mooring. He stood full across the path. "Miss Stanley, one word — by one word, one look decide.

You must decide for me whether I stay — or go — for ever !"

" I !—Mr. Beauclerc !—"

The look of astonishment — more than astonishment, almost of indignation — silenced him completely, and he stood dismayed. She pressed onwards, and he no longer stopped her path. For an instant he submitted in despair. " Then I must not think of it. I must go — must I, Miss Stanley ? Will not you listen to me, Helen ? Advise me ; let me open my heart to you as a friend."

She stopped under the shady tree beneath which they were passing, and, leaning against it, she repeated, " As a friend — but, no, no, Mr. Beauclerc—no ; I am not the friend you should consult — consult the General, your guardian."

" I have consulted him, and he approves."

" You have ! That is well, that is well at all events," cried she ; " if he approves, then all is right."

There was a ray of satisfaction on her countenance. He looked as if considering what she

exactly meant. He hoped again, and was again resolved to hazard the decisive words. "If you knew all!" and he pressed her arm closer to him—"if I might tell you all——?"

Helen withdrew her arm decidedly. "I know all," said she; "all I ought to know, Mr. Beauclerc."

"You know all!" cried he, astonished at her manner. "You know the circumstances in which I am placed?"

He alluded to the position in which he stood with Lady Castlefort; she thought he meant with respect to Lady Blanche, and she answered—"Yes: I know all!" and her eye turned towards the boat.

"I understand you," said he; "you think I ought to go?"

"Certainly," said she. It never entered into her mind to doubt the truth of what Lady Cecilia had told her, and she had at first been so much embarrassed by the fear of betraying what she felt she ought not to feel, and she was now so shocked by what she thought his dishonourable conduct, that she repeated

almost in a tone of severity — "Certainly, Mr. Beauclerc, you ought to go."

The words, "since you are engaged,"—"you know you are engaged," she was on the point of adding, but Lady Cecilia's injunctions not to tell him that she had betrayed his secret stopped her.

He looked at her for an instant, and then abruptly, and in great agitation, said; "May I ask, Miss Stanley, if your affections are engaged?"

"Is that a question, Mr. Beauclerc, which you have a right to ask me?"

"I have no right—no right, I acknowledge — I am answered."

He turned away from her, and ran down the bank towards the boat, but returned instantly, and exclaimed, "If you say to me, go! I am gone for ever!"

"Go!" Helen firmly pronounced. "You never can be more than a friend to me! Oh never be less!—go!"

"I am gone," said he, "you shall never see me more."

He went, and a few seconds afterwards she heard the splashing of his oars. He was gone! Oh! how she wished that they had parted sooner — a few minutes sooner, even before he had so looked — so spoken!

"Oh! that we had parted while I might have still perfectly esteemed him! but now ——!"

All was sorrow in her mind and utter confusion.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Helen attempted to walk, she trembled so much that she could not move, and leaning against the tree under which she was standing, she remained fixed for some time almost without thought.

Then she began to recollect what had been before all this, and as soon as she could walk she went back for her drawing-book, threw from her the pencil which Beauclerc had cut, and made her way home as fast as she could, and up to her own room, without meeting anybody; and as soon as she was there she bolted the door and threw herself upon her bed. She had by this time a dreadful headache, and she wanted to try and get rid of it in time for breakfast — that was her first object; but her thoughts were so confused that they could not fix upon any thing rightly.

She tried to compose herself, and to think the whole affair over again; but she could not. There was something so strange in what had passed! The sudden—the total change in her opinion—her total loss of confidence! She tried to put all thoughts and feelings out of her mind, and just to lie stupified if she could, that she might get rid of the pain in her head. She had no idea whether it was late or early, and was going to get up to look at her watch, when she heard the first bell, half an hour before breakfast, and this was the time when Cecilia usually opened the door between their rooms. She dreaded the sound, but when she had expected it some minutes, she became impatient even for that which she feared; she wanted to have it over, and she raised herself on her elbow, and listened with acute impatience: at last the door was thrown wide open, and, bright and gay as ever, in came Cecilia, but at the first sight of Helen on her bed, wan and miserable, she stopped short.

"My dearest Helen! what can be the matter?"

"Mr. Beauclerc——"

"Well! what of him?" cried Cecilia, and she smiled.

"Oh, Cecilia! do not smile; you cannot imagine——"

"Oh, yes! but I can," cried Cecilia. "I see how it is; I understand it all; and miserable and amazed as you look at this moment, I will set all right for you in one word. He is not going to be married—not engaged."

Helen started up. "Not engaged!"

"No more than you are, my dear! Oh! I am glad to see your colour come again!"

"Thank Heaven!" cried Helen, "then he is not——"

"A villain!—not at all. He is all that's right; all that is charming, my dear. So, thank Heaven, and be as happy as you please."

"But I cannot understand it," said Helen, sinking back; "I really cannot understand how it is, Cecilia."

Cecilia gave her a glass of water in great haste, and was very sorry, and very glad, and begged forgiveness, and all in a breath: but as yet Helen did not know what she had to for-

give, till it was explained to her in direct words, that Cecilia had told her not only what was not true, but what she at the time of telling knew to be false.

"For what purpose, oh! my dear Cecilia! All to save me from a little foolish embarrassment at first, you have made us miserable at last."

"Miserable! my dear Helen; at worst miserable only for half an hour. Nonsense! lie down again, and rest your poor head. I will go this minute to Granville. Where is he?"

"Gone! Gone for ever! Those were his last words."

"Impossible! absurd! Only what a man says in a passion. But where is he gone? Only to Old Forest! Gone for ever — gone till dinner-time! Probably coming back at this moment in all haste, like a true lover, to beg your pardon for your having used him abominably ill. Now, smile; do not shake your head, and look so wretched; but tell me exactly, word for word and look for look, all that passed between you, and then I shall know what is best to be done."

Word for word Helen could not answer, for she had been so much confused, but she told to the best of her recollection; and Cecilia still thought no great harm was done. She only looked a little serious from the apprehension, now the real, true apprehension, of what might happen about Lady Blanche, who, as she believed, was at Old Forest. "Men are so foolish; men in love, so rash. Beauclerc, in a fit of anger and despair on being so refused by the woman he loved, might go and throw himself at the feet of another for whom he did not care in the least, in a strange sort of revenge. But I know how to settle it all, and I will do it this moment."

But Helen caught hold of her hand, and firmly detaining it, absolutely objected to her doing anything without telling her exactly and truly what she was going to do.

Lady Cecilia assured her that she was only going to inquire from the General whether Lady Blanche was with her sister at Old Forest, or not. "Listen to me, my dear Helen; what I am going to say can do no mischief. If Lady Blanche is there, then the best thing

to be done is, for me to go immediately, this very morning, to pay the ladies a visit on their coming to the country, and I will bring back Granville. A word will bring him back. I will only tell him there was a little mistake, or if you think it best, I will tell him the whole truth. Let me go—only let me go and consult the General before the breakfast-bell rings, for I shall have no time afterwards."

Helen let her go, for as Beauclerc had told her that he had opened his mind to the General, she thought it was best that he should hear all that had happened.

The moment the General saw Lady Cecilia come in, he smiled, and said, "Well! my dear Cecilia, you have seen Helen this morning, and she has seen Beauclerc — what is the result? Does he stay, or go?"

"He is gone!" said Cecilia.

The General looked surprised, and sorry.

"He did not propose for her," continued Cecilia, "he did not declare himself—he only began to sound her opinion of him, and she—she contrived to misunderstand—to offend him.

and he is gone, but only to Old Forest, and we can have him back again directly."

"That is not likely," said the General, "because I know that Beauclerc had determined that if he went he would not return for some time. Your friend Helen was to decide. If she gave him any hope, that is, permitted him to appear as her declared admirer, he could with propriety, happiness, and honour, remain here; if not, my dear Cecilia, you must be sensible that he is right to go."

"Gone for some time!" repeated Cecilia, "you mean as long as Lady Castlefort is here."

"Yes," said the General.

"I wish she was gone, I am sure, with all my heart," said Cecilia; "but in the mean time, tell me, my dear Clarendon, do you know whether Lord Beltravers' sisters are at Old Forest?"

The General did not think that Lady Blanche had arrived; he was not certain, but he knew that the Comtesse de St. Cymon had arrived yesterday.

"Then," said Cecilia, "it would be but civil

to go to see the Comtesse. I will go this morning."

General Clarendon answered instantly, and with decision, that she must not think of such a thing—that it could not be done. "Madame de St. Cymon is a woman of doubtful reputation, not a person with whom Lady Cecilia Clarendon ought to form any acquaintance."

"No, not form an acquaintance—I'm quite aware of that," and eagerly she pleaded that she had no intention of doing anything; "but just one morning visit paid and returned, you know, leads to nothing. Probably we shall neither of us be at home, and never meet; and really it would be such a marked thing not to pay this visit to the Beltravers family on their return to the country. Formerly there was such a good understanding between the Forresters and your father; and really hospitality requires it. Altogether this one visit really must be paid, it cannot be helped, so I will order the carriage."

"It must not be done!" the General said; "it is a question of right, not of expediency."

"Right, but there is nothing really wrong,

surely; I believe all that has been said of her is scandal. Nobody is safe against reports—the public papers are so scandalous! While a woman lives with her husband, it is but charitable to suppose all is right. That 's the rule. Besides, we should not throw the first stone." Then Lady Cecilia pleaded, Lady this and Lady that, and the whole county, without the least scruple would visit Madame de St. Cymon.

" Lady this and Lady that may do as they please, or as their husbands think proper or improper, that is no rule for Lady Cecilia Clarendon; and as to the whole county, or the whole world, what is that to me, when I have formed my own determination?"

The fact was, that at this very time Madame de St. Cymon was about to be separated from her husband. A terrible discovery had just been made. Lord Beltravers had brought his sister to Old Forest to hide her from London disgrace; there he intended to leave her to rusticate, while he should follow her husband to Paris immediately, to settle the terms of separation or divorce.

"Beauclerc, no doubt, will go to Paris with him," said the General.

"To Paris! when will he set out?"

"To-day—directly, if Helen has decidedly rejected him; but you say he did not declare himself. Pray tell me all at once."

And if she had done so, all might have been well; but she was afraid. Her husband was as exact about *some things* as her mother; he would certainly be displeased at the deception she had practised on Helen; she could not tell him that, not at this moment, for she had just fooled him to the top of his bent about this visit; she would find a better time; she so dreaded the instant change of his smile—the look of disapprobation; she was so cowardly; in short, the present pain of displeasing—the consequences even of her own folly, she never could endure, and to avoid it she had always recourse to some new evasion; and now, when Helen—her dear Helen's happiness was at stake, she faltered—she paltered—she would not for the world do her any wrong; but still she thought she could manage without telling the whole—she would tell nothing *but* the truth.

So, after a moment's hesitation, while all these thoughts went through her mind, when the General repeated his question, and begged to know at once what was passing in her little head, she smiled in return for that smile which played on her husband's face while he fondly looked upon her, and she answered,

"I am thinking of poor Helen. She has made a sad mistake — and has a horrid headache at this moment — in short she has offended Beauclerc past endurance — past his endurance — and he went off in a passion before she found out her mistake. In short, we must have him back again; could you go, my dear love— or write directly?"

"First let me understand," said the General. "Miss Stanley has made a mistake—what mistake?"

"She thought Beauclerc was engaged to Lady Blanche."

"How could she think so? What reason had she?"

"She had been told so by somebody."

"Somebody! — that eternal scandal-monger Lady Katrine, I suppose."

"No — not Lady Katrine," said Cecilia; "but I am not at liberty to tell you whom."

"No matter; but Miss Stanley is not a fool — she could not believe somebody or anybody, contrary to common sense."

"No, but Beauclerc did not come quite to proposing—and you know she had been blamed for refusing Mr. Churchill before she was asked — and in short — in love, people do not always know what they are about."

"I do not understand one word of it," said the General; "nor I am sure do you, my dear Cecilia."

"Yes, I really do, but ——"

"My dear Cecilia, I assure you it is always best to let people settle their love affairs their own way."

"Yes, certainly — I would not interfere in the least — only to get Granville back again — and then let them settle it their own way. Cannot you call at Old Forest?"

"No."

"Could you not write?"

"No — not unless I know the whole. I will do nothing in the dark — always tell your

confessor, your lawyer, your physician, your friend, your whole case, or they are fools or rogues if they act for you — go back and repeat this to Helen Stanley from me."

"But, my dear, she will think it so unkind."

"Let her show me how I can serve her, and I will do it."

"Only write a line to Beauclerc — say, 'Beauclerc come back, — here has been a mistake.'"

She would have put a pen into his hand, and held paper to him.

"Let me know the whole, and then, and not till then, can I judge whether I should be doing right for her or not."

The difficulty of telling the whole had increased to Lady Cecilia, even from the hesitation and prevarication she had now made.

"Let me see, Helen, — let me speak to her myself — and learn what this strange nonsensical mystery is."

He was getting impatient.

"Cannot I see Miss Stanley?"

"Why no, my dear love, not just now, she has such a headache! She is lying down.

There is the breakfast-bell—after breakfast, if you please. But I am clear she would rather not speak to you herself on the subject."

"Then come down to breakfast, my dear, and let her settle it her own way — that is much the best plan. Interference in love matters always does mischief — come to breakfast, my dear — I have no time to lose — I must be off to a court-martial."

He looked at his watch, and Cecilia went half down stairs with him, and then ran back to keep Helen quiet by the assurance that all would be settled — all would be right, and that she would send her up some breakfast — she must not think of coming down; and Cecilia lamented half breakfast-time how subject to head-aches poor Helen was; and through this and through all other conversation, she settled what she would do for her. As the last resource, she would tell the whole truth — not to her husband, she loved him too well to face his displeasure for one moment — but to Beauclerc; and writing would be so much easier than speaking — without being put to the blush she could explain it

all to Beauclerc, and turn it playfully; and he would be so happy that he would be only too glad to forgive her, and to do any thing she asked. She concocted and wrote a very pretty letter, in which she took all the blame fully on herself — did perfect justice to Helen; said she wrote without her knowledge, and depended entirely upon his discretion, so he must come back of his own accord, and keep her counsel. This letter, however, she could not despatch so soon as she had expected; she could not send a servant with it till the General should be off to his court-martial.

Now had Cecilia gone the straight-forward way to work, her husband could in that interval, and would, have set all to rights; but this to Cecilia was impossible; she could only wait in an agony of impatience till the General and his officers were all out of the way, and then she despatched a groom with her letter to Old Forest, and desired him to return as fast as possible, while she went to Helen's room, to while away the time of anxious suspense as well as she could; and she soon succeeded in talking herself into excellent spirits again.

"Now, my dear Helen, if that unlucky mistake had not been made, — if you had not fancied that Granville was married already, — and if he had actually proposed for you — what would you have said? — in short — would you have accepted him?"

"Oh! Cecilia, I do hope he will understand how it all was; I hope he will believe that I esteem him as I always did: as to love ——"

Helen paused, and Lady Cecilia went on: "As to love, nobody knows anything about it till it comes—and here it is coming, I do believe!" continued she, looking out of the window. — No! not Mr. Beauclerc, but the man she had sent with her letter, galloping towards the house. Disappointed not to see Beauclerc himself, she could only conclude that as he had not his horse with him, he was returning in the boat.

The answer to her letter was brought in. At the first glance on the direction, her countenance changed. "Not Granville's hand! — what can have happened?" She tore open the note. "He is gone! — gone with Lord Beltravers! — set off! — gone to Paris!"

Helen said not one word, and Cecilia, in despair, repeated " Gone !—gone !—absolutely gone ! Nothing more can be done. Oh, that I had done nothing about it ! All has failed ! Heaven knows what may happen now ! Oh ! if I could but have let it all alone ! I never, never can forgive myself ! My dear Helen, be angry with me—reproach me : pray—pray reproach me as I deserve !"

But Helen could not blame one who so blamed herself—one who, however foolish and wrong she had been, had done it all from the kindest motives. In the agony of her penitence, she now told Helen all that had passed between her and the General ; that, to avoid the shame of confessing to him her first deception, she had gone on another and another step in these foolish evasions, contrivances, and mysteries ; how, thinking she could manage it, she had written without his knowledge ; and now, to complete her punishment, not only had everything which she had attempted failed, but a consequence which she could never have foreseen had happened.—" Here I am, with a note actually in my hand from this horrid Madame

de St. Cymon, whom Clarendon absolutely would not hear of my even calling upon! Look what she writes to me. She just took advantage of this opportunity to begin a correspondence before an acquaintance; but I will never answer her. Here is what she says:—

"'The Comtesse de St. Cymon exceedingly regrets that Lady Cecilia Clarendon's servant did not arrive in time to deliver her ladyship's letter into Mr. Beauclerc's own hand. Mr. B. left Old Forest with Lord Beltravers early to-day for Paris.

"'The Comtesse de St. Cymon, understanding that Lady Cecilia Clarendon is anxious that there should be as little delay as possible in forwarding her letter, and calculating that if returned by her ladyship's servant it must be too late for this day's post from Clarendon Park, has forwarded it immediately with her own letters to Paris, which cannot fail to meet Mr. Beauclerc directly on his arrival there.'

"Oh!" cried Lady Cecilia, "how angry the General would be if he knew of this!"

She tore the note to the smallest bits as she spoke, and threw them away; and next she begged that Helen would never say a word about it. There was no use in telling the General what would only vex him, and what could not be helped; and what could lead to nothing, for she should never answer this note, nor have any further communication of any kind with Madame de St. Cymon.

Helen, nevertheless, thought it would be much better to tell the General of it, and she wondered how Cecilia could think of doing otherwise, and just when she had so strongly reproached herself, and repented of these foolish mysteries; and this was going on another step. "Indeed, Cecilia," said Helen, "I wish—on my own account I wish you would not conceal anything. It is hard to let the General suspect me of extreme folly and absurdity, or of some sort of double dealing in this business, in which I have done my utmost to do right and to go straightforward."

Poor Helen, with her nervous headache beating worse and worse, remonstrated and entreated, and came to tears; and Lady Cecilia

promised that it should be all done as she desired; but again she changed and besought Helen to say nothing herself about the matter to the General: and, this acceded to, Lady Cecilia's feelings being as transient as they were vehement, all her self-reproaches, penitence, and fears passed away, and, taking her bright view of the whole affair, she ended with the certainty that Beauclerc would return the moment he received her letter; that he would have it in a very few days, and all would end well, and quite as well as if she had not been a fool.

CHAPTER VI.

THE first tidings of Beauclerc came in a letter from him to the General, written immediately after his arrival at Paris. But it was plain that it must have been written before Lady Cecilia's letter, forwarded by Madame de St. Cymon, could have reached him. It was evident that matters were as yet unexplained, from his manner of writing about "the death-blow to all his hopes," and now he was setting off with Lord Beltravers for Naples, to follow M. de St. Cymon, and settle the business of the sister's divorce. Lady Cecilia could only hope that her letter would follow him thither, enclosed in this Madame de St. Cymon's dispatches to her brother; and now they could know nothing more till they could hear from Naples.

Meanwhile, Helen perceived that, though the

General continued to be as attentive and kind to her as usual, yet that there was something more careful and reserved in his manner than formerly, less of spontaneous regard, and cordial confidence. It was not that he was displeased by her having discouraged the addresses of his ward, fond as he was of Beauclerc, and well as he would have been pleased by the match. This, he distinctly expressed the only time that he touched upon the subject. He said, that Miss Stanley was the best and the only judge of what would make her happy; but he could not comprehend the nature of the mistake she had made; Cecilia's explanations, whatever they were, had not made the matter clear. There was either some caprice, or some mystery, which he determined not to inquire into, upon his own principle of leaving people to settle their love affairs in their own way.

Helen's spirits were lowered: naturally of great sensibility, she depended more for her happiness on her inward feelings than upon any external circumstances. A great deal of gaiety was now going on constantly among the

young people at Clarendon Park, and this made her want of spirits more disagreeable to herself, more obvious, and more observed by others. Lady Katrine rallied her unmercifully. Not suspecting the truth, her ladyship presumed that Miss Stanley repented of having, before she was asked, said No instead of Yes, to Mr. Churchill. Ever since his departure she had evidently worn the willow.

Lady Cecilia was excessively vexed by this ill-natured raillery: conscious that she had been the cause of all this annoyance to Helen, and of much more serious evil to her, the zeal and tenderness of her affection now increased, and was shewn upon every little occasion involuntarily, in a manner that continually irritated her cousin Katrine's jealousy.

Helen had been used to live only with those by whom she was beloved, and she was not at all prepared for the sort of warfare which Lady Katrine carried on; her perpetual sneers, innuendoes, and bitter sarcasms, Helen did not resent, but she suffered. The arrows, ill-aimed and weak, could not penetrate far; it was not

with their point they wounded, but by their venom — wherever that touched it worked inward mischief.

Often to escape from one false imputation she exposed herself to another more grievous. One night, when the young people wished to dance, and the usual music was not to be had, Helen played quadrilles, and waltzes, for hours with indefatigable good-nature, and when some of the party returned their cordial thanks, Lady Katrine whispered, "Our musician has been well paid by Lord Estridge's admiration of her white hands." His lordship had not danced, and had been standing all the evening beside Helen, much to the discomfiture of Lady Katrine, who intended to have had him for her own partner.

The next night, Helen did not play, but joined the dance, and with a boy partner, whom nobody could envy her. The General, who saw wonderfully quickly the by-play of society, marked all this, and now his eye followed Helen through the quadrille, and he said to some one standing by, that Miss Stanley danced charmingly, to his taste, and in such

a lady-like manner. He was glad to see her in good spirits again; her colour was raised, and he observed that she looked remarkably well.

"Yes," Lady Katrine answered, "remarkably well; and black is so becoming to that sort of complexion, no doubt this is the reason Miss Stanley wears it so much longer than is customary for an uncle. Short or long mournings are, to be sure, just according to fashion, or feeling, as some say. For my part, I hate long mournings—so like ostentation of sentiment; whatever I did, at any rate I would be consistent. I never would dance in black. Pope, you know, has such a good cut at that sort of thing. Do you recollect the lines?

> 'And bear about the mockery of woe
> To midnight dances and the public show.'"

Lady Castlefort took Miss Stanley aside, after the dance was over, to whisper to her so good-naturedly, how shockingly severe Katrine had been; faithfully repeating every word that her sister had said. "And so cruel, to talk of your bearing about the *mockery* of woe!—But,

my sweet little lamb, do not let me distress you so."

Helen, withdrawing from the false caresses of Lady Castlefort, assured her that she should not be hurt by anything Lady Katrine could say, as she so little understood her real feelings; and at the moment her spirit rose against the injustice, and felt as much superior to such petty malice as even Lady Davenant could have desired.

She had resolved to continue in mourning for the longest period in which it is worn for a parent, because, in truth, her uncle had been a parent to her; and, besides the motive of affection and respect to his memory, she had other reasons — reasons of economy. Economy was necessary to enable her to carry into effect her generous determination to pay the Dean's debts. The difficulty she would find in living in the society she was now with, upon the very small income which remained to her after what she had given up, had been pointed out sufficiently by Mrs. Collingwood. Helen had replied that for the first year she should want nothing, as everything that could be necessary

for that mourning, which she should certainly continue to wear, had been most handsomely provided; but the morning after Lady Katrine's cruel remarks, Cecilia begged that Helen would oblige her by laying aside black. "Let it be on my birth-day." Lady Cecilia's birth-day was to be celebrated the ensuing week.

"Well, for that day certainly I will," Helen said; "but only for that day."

This would not satisfy Cecilia. Helen saw that Lady Katrine's observations had made a serious impression, and, dreading to become the subject of daily observation, perhaps altercation, she yielded. The mourning was thrown aside. Then everything she wore must be new. Lady Cecilia and Mademoiselle Felicie, her waiting-maid, insisted upon taking the matter into their own hands. Helen really intended only to let one dress for her friend's birth-day be bespoken for her; but from one thing she was led on to another. Lady Cecilia's taste in dress was exquisite. Her first general principle was admirable—"Whatever you buy, let it be the best of its kind, which is always the cheapest in the end." Her second maxim

was — "Never have anything but from such and such people, or from such and such places," naming those who were at the moment accredited by fashion.

"These, of course, make you pay high for the name of the thing; but that must be. The name is all," said Lady Cecilia. "Does your hat, your bonnet, whatever it be, come from the reigning fashionable authority? then it is right, and you are quite right. You can put down all objections and objectors with the magic of a name. You need think no more about your dress; you have no trouble; while the poor creatures who go toiling and rummaging in cheap shops—what comes of it? but total exhaustion and disgrace!

"Yesterday, now, my dear Helen, recollect. When Lady Katrine, after dinner, asked little Miss Isdale where she bought that pretty hat, the poor girl was quite out of countenance. 'Really she did not know; she only knew it was very cheap.' You saw that nobody could endure the hat afterwards; so that, cheap as it might be, it was money to all intents and pur-

poses absolutely thrown away, for it did not answer its purpose."

Helen, laughing, observed, that if its purpose had been to look well, and to make the wearer look well, it had fully succeeded.

"Sophistry, my dear Helen. The purpose was not to look well, but to have a distinguished air. Dress, and what we call fashion and taste altogether, you know, are mere matters of opinion, association of ideas, and so forth. When will you learn to reason, as mamma says? Do not make me despair of you."

Thus, half in jest, half in earnest, with truth and falsehood, sense and nonsense, prettily blended together, Lady Cecilia prevailed in overpowering Helen's better judgment, and obtained a hasty submission. In economy, as in morals, false principles are far more dangerous than any one single error. One false principle as to laying out money is worse than any bad bargain that can be made, because it leads to bad bargains innumerable. It was settled that all Helen wanted should be purchased, not only

from those who sold the best goods, but from certain very expensive houses of fashionably high name in London. And the next point Lady Cecilia insisted upon was, that Helen's dress should always be the same as her own. "You know it used to be so, my dear Helen, when we were children; let it be so now."

"But there is such a difference *now*," said Helen; and I cannot afford——"

"Difference! Oh! don't talk of differences — let there be none ever between us. Not afford! — nonsense, my dear — the expense will be nothing. In these days you get the materials of dress absolutely for nothing — the fashion — the making-up is all, as Felicie and I, and everybody who knows anything of the matter, can tell you. Now all that sort of thing we can save you — here is my wedding paraphernalia all at your service — patterns ready cut — and here is Felicie, whose whole French soul is in the toilette — and there is your own little maid, who has hands, and head, and heart, all devoted to you — so leave it to us — leave it to us, my dear — take no thought

what you shall put on — and you will put it on all the better."

Felicie was summoned.

" Felicie, remember Miss Stanley's dress is always to be the same as my own. It must be so, my dear. It will be the greatest pleasure to me," and with her most persuasive caressing manner she added, " My own dear Helen, if you love me, let it be so."

This was an appeal which Helen could not resist. She thought that she could not refuse without vexing Cecilia; and, from a sort of sentimental belief that she was doing Cecilia " a real kindness," — that it was what Cecilia called " a sisterly act," she yielded to what she knew was unsuited to her circumstances — to what was quite contrary to her better judgment.

It often so happens, that our friends doubly guard one obvious point of weakness, while another exists undiscovered by them, and unknown to ourselves. Lady Davenant had warned Helen against the dangers of indecision and coquetry with her lovers, but this

danger of extravagance in dress she had not foreseen — and into how much expense this one weak compliance would lead her Helen could not calculate.

She had fancied that, at least, till she went to town, she should not want any thing expensive — this was a great mistake. Formerly in England, as still in every other country but England, a marked difference was made in the style of dress in the country and in town. Formerly, overdressing in the country was reprobated as quite vulgar; but now, even persons of birth and fashion are guilty of this want of taste and sense. They display almost as much expensive dress in the country as in town.

It happened that, among the succession of company at Clarendon Park this summer, there came, self-invited, from the royal party in the neighbourhood, a certain wealthy lady, by some called "Golconda," by others "the Duchess of Baubleshire." She was passionately fond of dress, and she eclipsed all rivals in magnificence and variety of ornaments. At imminent peril of being robbed, she brought to the country, and carried about everywhere with her, an

amazing number of jewels, wearing two or three different sets at different times of the day — displaying them on the most absurdly improper occasions — at a fête champêtre, or a boat-race.

Once, after a riding-party, at a pic-nic under the trees, when it had been resolved unanimously that nobody should change their dress at dinner-time, Golconda appeared in a splendid necklace, displayed over her riding-dress, and when she was reproached with having broken through the general agreement not to dress, she replied that,

" Really she had put the thing on in the greatest hurry, without knowing well what it was, just to oblige her little page who had brought three sets of jewels for her choice— she had chosen the *most undressed* of the three, merely because she could not disappoint the poor little fellow."

Every one saw the affectation and folly, and above all, the vulgarity of this display, and those who were most envious were most eager to comfort themselves by ridicule. Never was the " Golconda" out of hearing, but Lady Katrine was ready with some instance of her

"absurd vanity." "If fortune had but blessed her with such jewels," Lady Katrine said, "she trusted she should have worn them with better grace;" but it did not appear that the taste for baubles was diminished by the ridicule thrown upon them—quite the contrary, it was plain that the laughers were only envious, and envious because they could not be envied.

Lady Cecilia, who had no envy in her nature —who was really generous—entered not into this vain competition; on the contrary, she refrained from wearing any of her jewels, because Helen had none; besides, simplicity was really the best taste, the General said so—this was well thought and well done for some time, but there was a little lurking love of ornaments in Cecilia's mind, nor was Helen entirely without sympathy in that taste. Her uncle had early excited it in her mind by frequent fond presents of the prettiest trinkets imaginable; the taste had been matured along with her love for one for whom she had such strong affection, and it had seemed to die with its origin. Before she left Cecilhurst, Helen had given away every ornament she possessed: she thought she could

never want them again, and she left them as souvenirs with those who had loved her and her uncle.

Cecilia on her birthday brought her a set of forget-me-nots, to match those which she intended to wear herself, and which had been long ago given to Lady Cecilia by the dear good Dean himself. This was irresistible to Helen, and they were accepted.

But this was only the prelude to presents of more value, which Helen scrupled to receive; yet—

"Oft to refuse and never once offend"

was not so easily done as said, especially with Lady Cecilia; she was so urgent, so caressing, and had so many plausible reasons, suitable to all occasions. On the General's birthday, Lady Cecilia naturally wished to wear his first gift to her—a pair of beautiful pearl bracelets. but then Helen must have the same. Helen thought that Roman pearl would do quite as well for her. She had seen some such excellent imitations that no eye could detect the difference.

"No eye! very likely; but still your own

conscience, my dear!" replied Lady Cecilia. "And if people ask whether they are real, what could you say? You know there are everywhere impertinent people; malicious Lady Katrines, who will ask questions. Oh! positively I cannot bear to think of your being detected in passing off counterfeits. In all ornaments, it should be genuine or none—none or genuine."

"None, then, let it be for me this time, dear Cecilia."

Cecilia seemed to submit, and Helen thought she had well settled it. But on the day of the General's *fête*, the pearl bracelets were on her dressing-table. They were from the General, and could not be refused. Cecilia declared she had nothing to do with the matter.

"Oh, Cecilia!"

"Upon my word!" cried Lady Cecilia; "and if you doubt me the General shall have the honour of presenting, and you the agony of refusing or accepting them in full salon."

Helen sighed, hesitated, and submitted. The General, on her appearing with the bracelets, bowed, smiled, and thanked her with his kind-

est look; and she was glad to see him look kindly upon her again.

Having gained her point so pleasantly this time, Lady Cecilia did not stop there; and Helen found there was no resource but to bespeak beforehand for herself whatever she apprehended would be pressed upon her acceptance. That one false principle which she had unwittingly — no — which she had weakly admitted, that their toilette should be always the same, led to endless difficulties, for either Helen was to be dressed above her fortune and circumstances, or Lady Cecilia was not to wear the ornaments suited to her rank and taste.

Fresh occasions for display, and new necessities for expense, continually occurred. Reviews, and races, and race-balls, and archery meetings, and archery balls, had been, and a regatta was to be. At some of these the ladies had appeared in certain uniforms, new, of course, for the day; and now preparations for the regatta had commenced, and were going on. It was to last several days: and after the boat-races in the morning, there were

to be balls at night. The first of these was to be at Clarendon Park, and Mademoiselle Felicie considered her lady's dress upon this occasion as one of the objects of first importance in the universe. She had often sighed over the long unopened jewel-box. Her lady might as well be nobody. Mademoiselle Felicie could no ways understand a lady well born not wearing that which distinguished her above the common; and if she was ever to wear jewels, the ball-room was surely the proper place. And the sapphire necklace would look *à ravir* with her lady's dress, which, indeed, without it, would have no effect; would be quite *mésquine* and *manquée*."

Now Lady Cecilia had a great inclination to wear that sapphire necklace, which probably Felicie saw when she commenced her remonstrances, for it is part of the business of the well-trained waiting-woman, to give utterance to those thoughts which her lady wishes should be divined and pressed into accomplishment. Cecilia considered whether it would not be possible to divide the double rows of her sapphires, to make out a set for Helen as well as for herself; she hesitated only because they

had been given to her by her mother, and she did not like to run the hazard of spoiling the set; but still she could manage it, and she would do it. Mademoiselle Felicie protested the attempt would be something very like sacrilege; to prevent which, she gave a hint to Helen of what was in contemplation.

Helen knew that with Cecilia, when once she had set her heart upon a generous feat of this kind, remonstrance would be in vain; she dreaded that she would, if prevented from the meditated division of the sapphires, purchase for her a new set: she had not the least idea what the expense was, but, at the moment, she thought anything would be better than letting Cecilia spoil her mother's present, or put her under fresh obligations of this sort. She knew that the sapphires had been got from the jewellers with whom her uncle had dealt, and who were no strangers to her name; she wrote, and bespoke a similar set to Lady Cecilia's.

"*Charmante!* the very thing," Mademoiselle Felicie foresaw, "a young lady so well born would determine on doing. And if she might add a little word, it would be good at the same opportunity to order a ruby brooch, the same

as her lady's, as that would be the next object in question for the second day's regatta ball, when it would be indispensable for that night's appearance; *positivement*, she knew her Lady would do it for Miss Stanley if Miss Stanley did not do it of her own head."

Helen did not think that a brooch could be very expensive; there was not time to consider about it—the post was going—she was afraid that Lady Cecilia would come in and find her writing, and prevent her sending the letter. She hastily added an order for the brooch, finished the letter, and dispatched it. And when it was gone she told Cecilia what she had done. Cecilia looked startled; she was well aware that Helen did not know the high price of what she had bespoken. But, determining that she would settle it her own way, she took care not to give any alarm, and shaking her head, she only reproached Helen playfully with having thus stolen a march upon her.

"You think you have out-generaled me, but we shall see. Remember, I am the wife of a general, and not without resources."

CHAPTER VII.

Of the regatta, of the fineness of the weather, the beauty of the spectacle, and the dresses of the ladies, a full account appeared in the papers of the day, of which it would be useless here to give a repetition, and shameful to steal or seem to steal a description.

We shall record only what concerns Helen.

With the freshness of youth and of her naturally happy temper, she was delighted with the whole, to her a perfectly new spectacle, and everybody was pleased except Lady Katrine, who, in the midst of every amusement, always found something that annoyed her, something that "should not have been so." She was upon this occasion more cross than usual, because this morning's uniform was not becoming to her, and was most particularly so to Miss Stanley, as all the gentlemen observed.

Just in time before the ladies went to dress for the ball at night, the precious box arrived, containing the set of sapphires. Cecilia opened it eagerly, to see that all was right. Helen was not in the room. Lady Katrine stood by, and when she found that these were for Helen, her envious indignation broke forth.

"The poor daughters of peers cannot indulge in such things," cried she; "they are fit only for rich heiresses! I understood," continued she, "that Miss Stanley had given away her fortune to pay her uncle's debts, but I presume she has thought better of that, as I always prophesied she would——generosity is charming, but, after all, sapphires are so becoming!"

Helen came into the room just as this speech was ended. Lady Katrine had one of the bracelets in her hand. She looked miserably cross, for she had been disappointed about some ornaments she had expected by the same conveyance that brought Miss Stanley's. She protested that she had nothing fit to wear to-night. Helen looked at Cecilia; and though Cecilia's look gave no encouragement, she begged that Lady Katrine would do her the

honour to wear these sapphires this night, since she had not received what her ladyship had ordered. Lady Katrine suffered herself to be prevailed on, but accepted with as ill a grace as possible.

The ball went on, and Helen at least was happier than if she had worn the bracelets. She had no pleasure in being the object of envy, and now, when she found that Cecilia could be and was satisfied, though their ornamants were not exactly alike, it came full upon her mind that she had done foolishly in bespeaking these sapphires: it was at that moment only a transient self-reproach for extravagance, but before she went to rest this night it became more serious.

Lady Davenant had been expected all day, but she did not arrive till late in the midst of the ball, and she just looked in at the dancers for a few minutes before she retired to her own apartment. Helen would have followed her, but that was not allowed. After the dancing was over, however, as she was going to her room, she heard Lady Davenant's voice, calling to her as she passed by; and, opening the door

softly, she found her still awake, and desiring to see her for a few minutes, if she was not too much tired.

"Oh no, not in the least tired; quite the contrary," said Helen.

After affectionately embracing her, Lady Davenant held her at arms' length, and looked at her as the light of the lamp shone full upon her face and figure. Pleased with her whole appearance, Lady Davenant smiled, and said, as she looked at her — "You seem, Helen, to have shared the grateful old fairy's gift to Lady Georgiana B. of the never-fading rose in the cheek. But what particularly pleases me, Helen, is the perfect simplicity of your dress. In the few minutes that I was in the ball-room to-night, I was struck with that over-dressed duchess: her figure has been before my eyes ever since, hung round with jewellery, and with that *auréole* a foot and a-half high on her head: like the Russian bride's head-gear, which Heber so well called 'the most costly deformity he ever beheld.' Really, this passion for baubles," continued Lady Davenant, "is the universal passion of our sex. I

will give you an instance to what extravagance it goes. I know a lady of high rank, who hires a certain pair of emerald earrings at fifteen hundred pounds per annum. She rents them in this way from some German countess in whose family they are an heir-loom, and cannot be sold."

Helen expressed her astonishment.

"This is only one instance, my dear; I could give you hundreds. Over the whole world, women of all ages, all ranks, all conditions, have been seized with this bauble insanity—from the counter to the throne. Think of Marie Antoinette and the story of her necklace; and Josephine and her Cisalpine pearls, and all the falsehoods she told about them to the emperor she reverenced, the husband she loved — and all for what? — a string of beads! But I forget," cried Lady Davenant, interrupting herself, "I must not forget how late it is: and I am keeping you up, and you have been dancing: forgive me! When once my mind is moved, I forget all hours. Good-night — or good-morning, my dear child; go, and rest." But just as Helen was withdrawing her hand, Lady Davenant's eye fixed on her

pearl bracelets — "Roman pearls, or real? Real, I see, and very valuable!—given to you, I suppose, by your poor dear extravagant uncle?"

Helen cleared her uncle's memory from this imputation, and explained that the bracelets were a present from General Clarendon. She did not know they were so "very valuable," but she hoped she had not done wrong to accept of them in the circumstances; and she told how she had been induced to take them.

Lady Davenant said she had done quite right. The General was no present-maker, and this exception in his favour could not lead to any future inconvenience. "But Cecilia," continued she, "is too much addicted to trinket giving, which ends often disagreeably even between friends, or at all events fosters a foolish taste, and moreover associates it with feelings of affection in a way particularly deceitful and dangerous to such a little, tender-hearted person as I am speaking to, whose common sense would too easily give way to the pleasure of pleasing or fear of offending a friend. Kiss me, and don't contradict me,

for your conscience tells you that what I say is true."

The sapphires, the ruby brooch, and all her unsettled accounts, came across Helen's mind; and if the light had shone upon her face at that moment, her embarrassment must have been seen; but Lady Davenant, as she finished the last words, laid her head upon the pillow, and she turned and settled herself comfortably to go to sleep. Helen retired with a disordered conscience. She could not rest, but, turning from side to side, she tried to recollect all that she had bought, to make out her accounts in her head, and to guess at the total amount of her debts; but still, uncertain as to the price of the sapphires and the ruby brooch, she could come to no conclusion. The first thing she did in the morning was to look in the red case in which the sapphires came, to see if there was any note of their price: she recollected having seen some little bit of card — it was found on the dressing-table. When she beheld the price, fear took away her breath — it was nearly half her whole year's income; still she *could* pay it. But the ruby brooch

that had not yet arrived — what would that cost? She hurried to her accounts; she had let them run on for months unlooked at, but she thought she must know the principal articles of expense in dress by her actual possessions.

There was a heap of little crumpled bills which, with Felicie's griffonage, Helen had thrown into her table-drawer. In vain did she attempt to decipher the figures, like apothecaries' marks, linked to quarters and three quarters, and yards, of gauzes, silks, and muslins, altogether inextricably puzzling. They might have been at any other moment laughable, but now they were quite terrible to Helen; the only thing she could make clearly out, was the total; she was astonished when she saw to how much little nothings can amount, an astonishment felt often by the most experienced — how much more by Helen, all unused to the arithmetic of economy! And there were divers articles yet unnamed, and, as Felicie said, unpaid for — charged to Lady Cecilia's account at various fashionable houses in town. In short, the total of her debt was overwhelming,

considerably above her whole year's income, even without the ruby brooch. At this instant her maid came in smiling with a packet, as if sure of being the bearer of the very thing her young lady most wished for; it was the brooch — the very last thing in the world she desired to see. With a trembling hand she opened the parcel, looked at the note of the price, and sank upon her chair half stupified, with her eyes fixed upon the sum.

She sat she knew not how long, till, roused by the opening of Cecilia's door, she hastened to put away the papers.

" Let me see them, my dear, don't put away those papers," cried Cecilia; " Felicie tells me that you have been at these horrid accounts these two hours, and — you look — my dear Helen, you must let me see how much it is!" She drew the total from beneath Helen's hand. It was astounding even to Cecilia, as appeared by her first unguarded look of surprise. But, recovering herself immediately, she in a playfully scolding tone told Helen that all this evil came upon her in consequence of her secret machinations. " You set about to counteract

me, wrote for things that I might not get them for you, you see what has come of it! As to these bills, they are all from tradespeople who cannot be in a hurry to be paid; and as to the things Felicie has got for you, she can wait, is not she a waiting-woman by profession? Now, where is the ruby-brooch? Have you never looked at it?— I hope it is pretty — I am sure it is handsome," cried she as she opened the case. "Yes; I like it prodigiously, I will take it off your hands, my dear, will that do?"

"No, Cecilia, I cannot let you do that, for you have one the same, I know, and you cannot want another — no, no."

"You speak like an angel, my dear, but you do not look like one," said Cecilia. "So woe-begone, so pale a creature, never did I see! do look at yourself in the glass; but you are too wretched to plague. Seriously, I want this brooch, and mine it must be — it is mine: I have a use for it, I assure you."

"Well, if you have a use for it, really," said Helen, "I should indeed be very glad——"

"Be glad then, it is mine," said Cecilia; "and now it is yours, my dear Helen, now, not a word! pray, if you love me!"

Helen could not accept of it; she thanked Cecilia with all her heart, she felt her kindness—her generosity, but even the hitherto irresistible words, "If you love me," were urged in vain. If she had not been in actual need of money, she might have been over-persuaded, but now her spirit of independence strengthened her resolution, and she persisted in her refusal.

Lady Davenant's bell rang, and Helen, slowly rising, took up the miserable accounts, and said, "Now I must go——"

"Where!" said Cecilia; "you look as if you had heard a knell that summoned you—what are you going to do?"

"To tell all my follies to Lady Davenant."

"Tell your follies to nobody but me," cried Lady Cecilia. "I have enough of my own to sympathise with you, but do not go and tell them to my mother, of all people; she, who has none of her own, how can you expect any mercy?"

"I do not; I am content to bear all the blame I so richly deserve, but I know that after she has heard me, she will tell me what I ought to do, she will find out some way of settling it all rightly, and if that can but be, I do not care how much I suffer. So the sooner I go to her the better," said Helen.

"But you need not be in such a hurry; do not be like the man who said, 'Je veux être l'enfant prodigue, je veux être l'enfant perdu.' L'enfant prodigue, well and good, but why l'enfant perdu?"

"My dear Cecilia, do not play with me now—do not stop me," said Helen anxiously. "It is serious with me now, and it is as much as I can do——"

Cecilia let her go, but trembled for her, as she looked after her, and saw her stop at her mother's door.

Helen's first knock was too low, it was unheard, she was obliged to wait; another, louder, was answered by, "Come in." And in the presence she stood, and into the middle of things she rushed at once; the accounts, the total, lay before Lady Davenant. There it

was: and the culprit, having made her confession, stood waiting for the sentence.

The first astonished change of look, was certainly difficult to sustain. "I ought to have foreseen this," said Lady Davenant; "my affection has deceived my judgment. Helen, I am sorry for your sake and for my own."

"Oh do not speak in that dreadful calm voice, as if—do not give me up at once," cried Helen.

"What can I do for you? what can be done for one who has no strength of mind?"

I have some, thought Helen, or I should not be here at this moment.

"Of what avail, Helen, is your good heart—your good intentions, without the power to abide by them? When you can be drawn aside from the right by the first paltry temptation—by that most contemptible of passions—the passion for baubles! You tell me it was not that, what then? a few words of persuasion from any one who can smile, and fondle, and tell you that they love you;—the fear of offending Cecilia! how absurd! Is this what you both call friendship? But weaker still, Helen,

I perceive that you have been led blindfold in extravagance by a prating French waiting-maid — to the brink of ruin, the very verge of dishonesty."

"Dishonesty! how?"

"Ask yourself, Helen: is a person honest, who orders and takes from the owner that for which she cannot pay? Answer me, honest or dishonest."

"Dishonest! if I had intended not to pay. But I did intend to pay, and I will."

"You will! The weak have no will—never dare to say I will. Tell me how you will pay that which you owe. You have no means — no choice, except to take from the fund you have already *willed* to another purpose. See what good intentions come to, Helen, when you cannot abide by them!"

"But I can," cried Helen; "whatever else I do, I will not touch that fund, destined for my dear uncle—I have not touched it."

"Not yet, Helen, but you must, you cannot pay both your uncle's debts and your own. Justice may be, in the opinion of the dishonest sentimentalist, a slow-paced virtue, that cannot

keep up with generosity; but I am no sentimentalist, I am plainly honest, and I require honesty in those whom I can continue to esteem."

"I am plainly honest, too," cried Helen, "only have patience with me, and I will pay all."

"How?"

"Out of my allowance — my income — in time — I only ask time."

"And how long? Have you ever calculated — can you calculate? How long do you think you would be in paying this debt? Look at this total."

Helen closed her eyes for one instant, but, opening them, and fixing them on the sum to which Lady Davenant with stern steadiness pointed, she answered, "I could pay it in two years, and I will — I will give up my whole allowance."

"And what will you live upon in the mean time?"

"I should not have said my whole allowance, but I can do with very little, I will buy nothing new."

"Buy nothing — live upon nothing!" re-

peated Lady Davenant; "how often have I heard these words said by the most improvident, in the moment of repentance, even then as blind and uncalculating as ever! And you, Helen, talk to me of your powers of forbearance, — you, who, with the strongest motive your heart could feel, have not been able for a few short months to resist the most foolish —the most useless fancies."

Helen burst into tears. But Lady Davenant, unmoved, at least to all outward appearance, coldly said, "It is not feeling that you want, or that I require from you; I am not to be satisfied by words or tears."

"I deserve it all," said Helen; "and I know you are not cruel. In the midst of all this, I know you are my best friend."

Lady Davenant was now obliged to be silent, lest her voice should betray more tenderness than her countenance chose to shew.

"Only tell me what I can do now," continued Helen; "what can I do?"

"What you CAN do, I will tell you, Helen. Who was the man you were dancing with last night?"

"I danced with several; which do you mean?"

"Your partner in the quadrille you were dancing when I came in."

"Lord Estridge: but you know him — he has been often here."

"Is he rich?" said Lady Davenant.

"Oh yes, very rich, and very self-sufficient: he is the man Cecilia used to call '*Le Prince de mon mérite.*'"

"Did she? I do not remember. He made no impression on me, nor on you, I dare say."

"Not the least, indeed."

"No matter, he will do as well as another, since he is rich. You can marry him, and pay your present debts, and contract new, for thousands instead of hundreds: — this is what you CAN do, Helen."

"Do you think I can?" said Helen.

"You can, I suppose, as well as others. You know that young ladies often marry to pay their debts?"

"So I once heard," said Helen, "but is it possible?"

"Quite. You might have been told more—

that they enter into regular partnerships, joint-stock companies with dressmakers and jewellers, who make their ventures and bargains on the more or less reputation of the young ladies for beauty or for fashion, supply them with finery, speculate on their probabilities of matrimonial success, and trust to being repaid after marriage. Why not pursue this plan next season in town? You must come to it like others, whose example you follow — why not begin it immediately?"

There is nothing so reassuring to the conscience as to hear, in the midst of blame that we do deserve, suppositions of faults, imputations which we know to be unmerited — impossible. Instead of being hurt or alarmed by what Lady Davenant had said, the whole idea appeared to Helen so utterly beneath her notice, that the words made scarcely any impression on her mind, and her thoughts went earnestly back to the pressing main question — "What can I do, honestly, to pay this money that I owe?" She abruptly asked Lady Davenant if she thought the jeweller could be prevailed

upon to take back the sapphires and the brooch?

"Certainly not, without a considerable loss to you," replied Lady Davenant; but with an obvious change for the better in her countenance, she added, "Still, the determination to give up the bauble is good: the means, at whatever loss, we will contrive for you, if you are determined."

"Determined! — oh yes." She ran for the bracelets and brooch, and eagerly put them into Lady Davenant's hand. And now another bright idea came into her mind: she had a carriage of her own—a very handsome carriage, almost new; she could part with it — yes, she would, though it was a present from her dear uncle—his last gift: and he had taken such pleasure in having it made perfect for her. She was very, very fond of it, but she would part with it; she saw no other means of abiding by her promise, and paying his debts and her own. This passed rapidly through her mind; and when she had expressed her determination, Lady Davenant's manner instantly returned to

all its usual kindness, and she exclaimed as she embraced her, drew her to her, and kissed her again and again — "You are my own Helen! These are deeds, Helen, not words: I am satisfied — I may be satisfied with you now!

"And about that carriage, my dear, it shall not go to a stranger, it shall be mine. I want a travelling chaise — I will purchase it from you: I shall value it for my poor friend's sake, and for your's, Helen. So now it is settled, and you are clear in the world again. I will never spoil you, but I will always serve you, and a greater pleasure I cannot have in this world. My child, I deserve this pleasure for having withstood my first foolish impulse, when you told me of your folly. I longed to pay the money that instant, but I resisted; I give myself infinite credit for that. I should have been a weak, unworthy friend, had I spared you the pain you have felt this last hour: it will make you wiser — better, I do believe, you cannot be."

After this happy termination of the dreaded confession, how much did Helen rejoice that she had had the courage to tell all to her

friend. The pain was transient — the confidence permanent.

As Helen was going into her own room, she saw Cecilia flying up stairs towards her, with an open letter in her hand, her face radiant with joy.

"I always knew it would all end well! Churchill might well say that all the sand in my hour-glass was diamond sand. There, my dear Helen — there," cried Cecilia, embracing her as she put the letter into her hand.

It was from Beauclerc, his answer to Lady Cecilia's letter, which had followed him to Naples. It was written the very instant he had read her explanation, and, warm from his heart, he poured out all the joy he felt on hearing the truth, and, in his transport of delight, he declared that he quite forgave Lady Cecilia, and would forget, as she desired, all the misery she had made him feel. Some confounded quarantine, he feared, might detain him, but he would certainly be at Clarendon Park in as short a time as possible. Helen's first smile, he said, would console him for all he had suffered, and make him forget everything.

Helen's first smile he did not see, nor the blush which spread and rose as she read. Cecilia was delighted. "Generous, affectionate Cecilia!" thought Helen; "if she has faults, and she really had but one, who could help loving her?"

Not Helen, certainly, or she would have been the most ungrateful of human beings.

Besides her sympathy in Helen's happiness, Cecilia was especially rejoiced at this letter, coming, as it did, the very day after her mother's return; for though she had written to Lady Davenant on Beauclerc's departure, and told her that he was gone only on Lord Beltravers' account, yet she dreaded that, when it came to speaking, her mother's penetration would discover that something extraordinary had happened. Now all was easy. Beauclerc was coming back: he had finished his friend's business, and, before he returned to Clarendon Park he wished to know if he might appear there as the acknowledged admirer of Miss Stanley—if he might with any chance of success pay his addresses to her. Secure that her mother would never ask to see the letter, con-

sidering it either as a private communication to his guardian, or as a love letter to Helen, Cecilia gave this version of it to Lady Davenant; and how she settled it with the General, Helen never knew, but it seemed all smooth and right.

And now, the regatta being at an end, the archery meetings over, and no hope of further gaiety for this season at Clarendon Park, the Castleforts and Lady Katrine departed. Lady Katrine's last satisfaction was the hard haughty look with which she took leave of Miss Stanley — a look expressing, as well as the bitter smile and cold form of good breeding could express it, unconquered, unconquerable hate.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE is no better test of the strength of affection than the ready turning of the mind to the little concerns of a friend, when pre-occupied with important interests of our own. This was a proof of friendship, which Lady Davenant had lately given to Helen, for, at the time when she had entered with so much readiness and zeal into Helen's little difficulties and debts, great political affairs and important interests of Lord Davenant's were in suspense, and pressed heavily upon her mind.

What might be the nature of these political embarrassments had not been explained. Lady Davenant had only hinted at them. She said, "she knew from the terror exhibited by the inferior creatures in office that some change in administration was expected, as beasts are said to howl and tremble before storm, or earthquake, or any great convulsion of nature takes place."

Since Lady Davenant's return from town, where Lord Davenant still remained, nothing had been said of the embassy to Russia but that it was delayed.

Lady Cecilia, who was quick, and, where she was not herself concerned, usually right, in interpreting the signs of her mother's discomfiture, guessed that Lord Davenant had been circumvented by some diplomatist of inferior talents, and she said to Helen,

"When an ass kicks you, never tell it, is a maxim which mamma heard from some friend, and she always acts upon it; but a kick, whether given by ass or not, leaves a bruise, which sometimes tells in spite of ourselves, and my mother should remember another maxim of that friend's, that the faults and follies of the great are the delight and comfort of the little.

"Now, my mother, though she is so well suited, from her superior abilities and strength of mind, and all that, to be the wife of a great political leader, yet in some respects she is the most unfit person upon earth for *the situation;* for, though she feels the necessity of conciliating, she cannot unbend with her inferiors, that

is, with half the world. As Catalani said of singing, it is much more difficult to descend than to ascend well. Shockingly mamma shews in her manner sometimes how tired she is of the stupid, and how she despises the mean; and all the underlings think she can undo them with papa, for it has gone abroad that she *governs*, while in fact, though papa asks her advice, to be sure, because she is so wise, she never does interfere in the least: but, now it has once got into the world's obstinate head that she does, it cannot be put out again, and mamma is the last person upon earth to take her own part, or condescend to explain and set things right. She is always thinking of papa's glory and the good of the public, but the public will never thank him and much less her; so there she is a martyr, without her crown; now, if I were to make a martyr of myself, which, Heaven forbid! I would at least take right good care to secure my crown, and to have my full glory round my head, and set on becomingly!

"But seriously, my dear Helen," continued Lady Cecilia, "I am unhappy about papa and mamma, I assure you. I have seen little clouds

of discontent long gathering, lowering, and blackening, and I know they will burst over their heads in some tremendous storm at last."

Helen hoped not, but looked frightened.

"Oh, you may hope not, my dear, but I know it will be—we may not hear the thunder, but we shall see the lightning all the more dangerous. We shall be struck down, unless ——" she paused.

"Unless what?" said Helen.

"Unless the storm be dispersed in time."

"And how?"

"The lightning drawn off by some good conductor—such as myself; I am quite serious, and though you were angry with me for laughing just now, as if I was not the best of daughters, even though I laugh, I can tell you I am meditating an act of self-devotion for my mother's sake—a grand *coup d'état*.

"*Coup d'état*? you, Cecilia! my dear——"

"I, Helen, little as you think of me."

"Of your political talents you don't expect me to think much, do you?"

"My political talents! you shall see what they are. I am capable of a grand *coup d'état*.

I will have next week a three days' congress, anti-political, at Clarendon Park, where not a word of politics shall be heard, nor anything but nonsense if I can help it, and the result shall be, as you shall see, good-will between all men, and all women—women? yes, there's the grand point. Mamma has so affronted two ladies, very influential as they call it, each — Lady Masham, a favourite at court, and Lady Bearcroft, risen from the ranks, on her husband's shoulders; he, 'a man of law,' Sir Benjamin Bearcroft, and very clever she is I hear, but loud and coarse: absolutely inadmissible she was thought till lately, and now, only tolerated for her husband's sake, but still have her here I must."

"I think you had better not," remonstrated Helen; "if she is so very vulgar, Lady Davenant and the General will never endure her."

"Oh, he will! The General will bear a great deal for mamma's sake, and more for papa's. I must have her, my dear, for the husband's of consequence, and, though he is ashamed of her, for that very reason he cannot bear that anybody should neglect her, and terribly mamma

has neglected her! Now, my dear Helen, do not say a word more against it."

Very few words had Helen said.

"I must ponder well," continued Cecilia, "and make out my list of worthies, my concordatum party."

Helen much advised the consulting Lady Davenant first; but Lady Cecilia feared her mother might be too proud to consent to any advance on her own part.

Helen still feared that the bringing together such discordant people would never succeed, but Lady Cecilia, always happy in paying herself with words answerable to her wishes, replied, "that discords well managed often produced the finest harmony." The only point she feared was, that she should not gain the first step, that she should not be able to prevail upon the General to let her give the invitations. In truth, it required all her persuasive words and more persuasive looks to accomplish this preliminary, and to bring General Clarendon to invite, or permit to be invited, to Clarendon Park, persons whom he knew but little and liked not at all.

But as Lady Cecilia pleaded and urged that it would soon be over, "the whole will be over in three days — only a three day's visit; and for mamma! — I am sure, Clarendon — you will do any thing for her, and for papa, and your own Cecilia?"

The General smiled, and the notes were written, and the invitations were accepted, and when once General Clarendon had consented, he was resolutely polite in his reception of these to him unwelcome guests. His manner was not false; it was only properly polite, not tending to deceive any one who understood the tokens of conventional good breeding. It however required considerable power over himself to keep the line of demarcation correctly, with one person in particular to whom he had a strong political aversion: Mr. Harley. — His very name was abhorrent to General Clarendon, who usually designated him as "That Genius, Cecilia — that favourite of your mother's!"—while to Lady Davenant Mr. Harley was the only person from whose presence she anticipated any pleasure, or who could make the rest of the party to her endurable.

Helen, though apprehensive of what might be the ultimate result of this congress, yet could not help rejoicing that she should now have an opportunity of seeing some of those who are usually considered "high as human veneration can look."

It is easy, after one knows who is who, to determine that we should have found out the characteristic qualities and talents in each countenance. Lady Cecilia, however, would not tell Helen the names of the celebrated unknown who were assembled when they went into the drawing-room before dinner, and she endeavoured to guess from their conversation the different characters of the speakers; but only a few sentences were uttered, signifying nothing; snuff-boxes were presented, pinches taken and inclinations made with becoming reciprocity, but the physiognomy of a snuff-box Helen could not interpret, though Lavater asserts that everything in nature, even a cup of tea, has a physiognomy.

Dinner was announced, and the company paired off, seemingly not standing on the order of their going; yet all, especially as

some were strangers, secretly mindful of their honours, and they moved on in precedence just, and found themselves in places due at the dinner-table.

But Helen did not seem likely to obtain more insight into the characters of these great personages in the dining-room than she had done in the drawing-room. For it often happens that, when the most celebrated, and even the most intellectual persons are brought together expressly for the purpose of conversation, then it does not flow, but sinks to silence, and ends at last in the stagnation of utter stupidity Each seems oppressed with the weight of his own reputation, and, in the pride of high celebrity, and the shyness, real or affected, of high rank, each fears to commit himself by a single word. People of opposite parties, when thrown together, cannot at once change the whole habit of their minds, nor without some effort refrain from that abuse of their opposites in which they can indulge when they have it all to themselves. Now every subject seems laboured—for in the pedantry of party spirit no partizan will speak but in the slang or cant of

his own craft. Knowledge is not only at one entrance, but at every entrance, quite shut out, and even literature itself grows perilous, so that to be safe they must all be dumb.

Lady Cecilia Clarendon was little aware of what she undertook when she called together this heterogeneous assembly of uncongenials and dissimilars round her dinner-table. After she had in vain made what efforts she could, and, well skilled in throwing the ball of conversation, had thrown it again and again without rebound from either side, she felt that all was flat, and that the silence and the stupidity were absolutely invincible.

Helen could scarcely believe, when she tried afterwards to recollect, that she had literally this day, during the whole of the first course, heard only the following sentences, which came out at long intervals between each couple of questions and answers—or observations and acquiescences.

"We had a shower."

"Yes, I think so."

"But very fine weather we have had."

"Only too hot."

"Quite."

"The new buildings at Marblemore — are they getting on, my Lord?"

"Do not know; did not come that way."

"Whom have they now at Dunstanbury?" was the next question. Then in reply came slowly a list of fashionable names.

"Sir John died worth a million, they say."

"Yes, a martyr to the gout."

"Has Lady Rachel done anything for her eyes?"

"Gone to Brighton, I believe."

"Has anything been heard of the North Pole expedition?"

"Not a word."

"Crockly has got a capital cook, and English too."

"English! eh?"

"English—yes."

Lord Davenant hoped this English cook would, with the assistance of several of his brother *artistes* of the present day, redeem our country from one-half of the Abbé Gregoire's reproach. The Abbé has said that England would be the finest country in the world,

but that it wants two essentials, *sunshine* and *cooks*.

"Good! Good! Very!" voices from different sides of the table pronounced; and there was silence again.

At the dessert, however, after the servants had withdrawn, most people began to talk a little to their next neighbours; but by this Helen profited not, for each pair spoke low, and those who were beside her on either hand, were not disposed to talk: she was seated between Sir Benjamin Bearcroft and Mr. Harley — Sir Benjamin the man of law, and Mr. Harley the man of genius, each eminent in his kind; but he of law seemed to have nothing in him but law, of which he was very full. In Sir Benjamin's economy of human life it was a wholesome rule, which he practised invariably, to let his understanding sleep in company, that it might waken in the courts, and for his repose he needed not what some great men have professed so much to like — "the pillow of a woman's mind."

Helen did not much regret the silence of this great legal authority, but she was very sorry

that the man of genius did not talk; she did not expect him to speak to her, but she wished to hear him converse with others. But something was the matter with him; from the moment he sat down to dinner Helen saw he seemed discomfited. He first put his hand across his eyes, then pressed his forehead: she feared he had a bad head-ache. The hand went next to his ear, with a shrinking, excruciating gesture; it must be the ear-ache, thought Helen. Presently his jaws were pinched together; tooth-ache perhaps. At last she detected the disturbing cause. Opposite to Mr. Harley, and beside Lady Davenant, sat a person whom he could not endure; one, in the first place, of an opposite party, but that was nothing; a man who was, in Mr. Harley's opinion, a disgrace to any party, and what could bring him here? They had had several battles in public, but had never before met in private society, and the aversion of Mr. Harley seemed to increase inversely as the squares of the distance.

Helen could not see in the object adequate cause for this antipathy: the gentleman

looked civil, smiling, rather mean, and quite insignificant, and he really was as insignificant as he appeared — not of consequence in any point of view. He was not high in office, nor ambassador, nor *chargé-d'affaires;* not certain that he was an *attaché* even, but he was said to have the ear of *somebody*, and was reputed to be secretly employed in diplomatic transactions of equivocal character; disclaimed, but used, by his superiors, and courted by his timid inferiors, whom he had persuaded of his great influence *somewhere.*

Lady Cecilia had been assured, from good authority, that he was one who ought to be propitiated on her father's account, but now, when she perceived what sort of creature he was, sorely did she repent that he had been invited; and her mother, by whom he sat, seemed quite oppressed and nauseated.

So ended the dinner. And, as Lady Cecilia passed the General in going out of the room, she looked her contrition, her acknowledgment that he was perfectly right in his prophecy that it would never do.

CHAPTER IX.

It was rather worse when the ladies were by themselves. Some of the party were personally strangers to Lady Davenant; all had heard of her sufficiently; most had formed a formidable and false opinion of her. Helen was quite astonished at the awe her ladyship inspired in strangers.

Lady Davenant's appearance and manner at this moment were not, indeed, calculated to dispel this dread. She was unusually distant and haughty, from a mistaken sort of moral pride. Aware that some of the persons now before her had, in various ways, by their own or their husbands' means, power to serve or to injure Lord Davenant, she disdained to propitiate them by the slightest condescension.

But how any persons in England — in London - - could be strangers to Lady Davenant,

was, to a foreign lady who was present, matter of inexpressible surprise. She could not understand how the wives of persons high in political life, some of opposite, but some of the same parties, should often be personally strangers to each other.

Foreigners are, on first coming to England, apt to imagine that all who act together in public life must be of the same private society; while, on the contrary, it often happens that the ladies especially of the same party are in different grades of fashion—moving in different orbits. The number of different circles and orbits in London is, indeed, astonishing to strangers, and the manner in which, though touching at tangents, these keep each their own path, attracted and repelled, or mutually influential, is, to those who have not seen and studied the planisphere, absolutely incomprehensible.

And, as she pondered on this difficulty, the ambassadress, all foreigner as she was, and all unused to silence, spoke not, and no one spoke: and nought was heard but the cup on the saucer, or the spoon in the cup, or the buzzing of a fly in the window.

In the midst of this awful calm it was that Lady Bearcroft blurted out with loud voice — "Amazing entertaining we are! so many clever people got together, too, for what?"

It was worth while to have seen Lady Masham's face at that moment! Lady Bearcroft saw it, and, fearing no mortal, struck with the comic of that look of Lady Masham's, burst into laughter uncontrolled, and the contrast of dignity and gravity in Lady Davenant only made her laugh the more, till out of the room at last she ran.

Lady Masham all the while, of course, never betrayed the slightest idea that she could by any possibility have been the object of Lady Bearcroft's mirth. But Lady Davenant — how did she take it? To her daughter's infinite relief, quite quietly; she looked rather amused than displeased. She bore with Lady Bearcroft, altogether, better than could have been expected; because she considered her only as a person unfortunately out of her place in society, and, without any fault of her own, dragged up from below to a height of situation for which nature had never intended, and

neither art nor education had ever prepared her; whose faults and deficiencies were thus brought into the flash of day at once, before the malice of party and the fastidiousness of fashion, which knows not to distinguish between *manque d'esprit*, and *manque d'usage*.

Not so Lady Davenant: she made liberal and philosophic allowance for even those faults of manner which were most glaring, and she further suspected that Lady Bearcroft purposely exaggerated her own vulgarity, partly for diversion, partly to make people stare, and partly to prevent their seeing what was habitual, and what involuntary, by hiding the bounds of reality.

Of this Lady Masham had not the most distant conception; on the contrary, she was now prepared to tell a variety of odd anecdotes of Lady Bearcroft. She had seen, she said, this extraordinary person before, but had never met her in society, and delighted she was unexpectedly to find her here — "quite a treat."

Such characters are indeed seldom met with at a certain height in the atmosphere of society,

and such were peculiarly and justly Lady Masham's delight, for they relieved the *ennui* of her court life, and at the same time fed a sense of superiority insufficient to itself. Such a person is fair, privileged, safe game, and Lady Masham began, as does a reviewer determined to be especially severe, with a bit of praise.

"Really very handsome, Lady Bearcroft must have been! Yes, as you say, Lady Cecilia, she is not out of blow yet certainly, only too full blown rather for some tastes—fortunately not for Sir Benjamin; he married her, you know, long ago, for her beauty; she is a very correct person—always was; but they do repeat the strangest things she says—so very odd! and they tell such curious stories, too, of the things she does."

Lady Masham then detailed a variety of anecdotes, which related chiefly to Lady Bearcroft's household cares, which never could she with haste dispatch; then came stories of her cheap magnificence and extraordinary toilette expedients.

"I own," continued Lady Masham, "that I always thought the descriptions I heard

must be exaggerated; but one is compelled to acknowledge that there is here in reality a terrible want of tact. Poor Sir Benjamin! I quite pity him, he must so see it! Though not of the first water himself, yet still he must feel, when he sees Lady Bearcroft with other people! He has feeling, though nobody would guess it from his look, and he shews it too, I am told; sadly annoyed he is sometimes by her *mal-apropoisms*. One day, she at one end of the table and he at the other, her ladyship, in her loud voice, called out to him, "Sir Benjamin! Sir Benjamin! this is our wedding-day!" He, poor man, did not hear; she called out again louder, "Sir Benjamin, my dear, this day fifteen years ago you and I were married!" "Well, my dear," he answered, "well, my dear, how can I possibly help that now!"

Pleased with the success of this anecdote, which raised a general smile, Lady Masham vouched for its perfect correctness, "she had it from one, who heard it from a person who was actually present at the time it happened." Lady Davenant had not the least doubt of the

correctness of the story, but she believed the names of the parties were different; she had heard it years ago of another person. It often happens, as she observed, to those who make themselves notoriously ridiculous, as to those who become famous for wit, that all good things in their kinds are attributed to them; though the one may have no claim to half the witticisms, and the other may not be responsible for half the absurdities for which they have the reputation.

It required all Lady Masham's politeness to look pleased, and all her candour to be quite happy to be set right as to that last anecdote. But many she had heard of Lady Bearcroft were really incredible. "Yet one would almost believe anything of her."

While she was yet speaking, Lady Bearcroft returned, and her malicious enemy, leaning back in her chair as in expectation of the piece beginning, waited for her puppet to play or be played off.

All this time Lady Cecilia was not at ease; she, well aware what her mother would feel, and had felt, while Lady Masham was going on

with this gossip-talk, had stood between her ladyship and Lady Davenant, and, as Lady Masham did not speak much above her breath, Cecilia had for some time flattered herself that her laudable endeavours to intercept the sound, or to prevent the sense from reaching her mother's ear, had succeeded, especially as she had made as many exclamations as she could of "Really!" "Indeed!" "How extraordinary!" "You do not say so?" which, as she pronounced them might have excited the curiosity of common-place people, but which she knew would in her mother's mind deaden all desire to listen. However, Lady Masham had raised her voice, and from time to time had stretched her neck of snow beyond Lady Cecilia's intercepting drapery, so as actually to claim Lady Davenant's attention. The consequences her daughter heard and felt.

She heard the tap, tap, tap of the ivory folding-knife upon the table; and well, interpreting, she knew, even before she saw her mother's countenance, that Lady Masham had undone herself, and, what was of much more consequence, had destroyed all chance of ac-

complishing that reconciliation with "mamma," that projected coalition which was to have been of such ultimate advantage to "papa."

Notwithstanding Lady Bearcroft's want of knowledge of the great world, she had considerable knowledge of human nature, which stood her wonderfully in stead. She had no notion of being made sport of for the *elegantes*, and, with all Lady Masham's plausibility of persiflage, she never obtained her end, and never elicited anything really absurd by all attempts to draw her out — out she would not be drawn.

After an unconquerable silence and all the semblance of dead stupidity, Lady Bearcroft suddenly shewed signs of life, however, and she, all at once, began to talk — to Helen of all people! — And why? — because she had taken, in her own phrase, a monstrous fancy to Miss Stanley; she was not sure of her name, but she knew she liked her nature, and it would be a pity that her reason should not be known and in the words in which she told it to Lady Cecilia.

"Now I will just tell you why I have taken

such a monstrous fancy to your friend here, Miss Hanley——"

"Miss Stanley — give me leave to mention," said Lady Cecilia. "Let me introduce you regularly."

"Oh! by no means; don't trouble yourself now, Lady Cecilia, for I hate regular introductions. But, as I was going to tell you how, before dinner to-day, as I came down the great staircase, I had an uncommon large, big, and, for aught I know, yellow corking-pin, which that most careless of all careless maids of mine — a good girl, too — had left sticking point foremost out of some part of me. Miss Hanley — Stanley (beg pardon) was behind, and luckily saw and stopped. Out she pulled it, begging my pardon; so kindly too, I only felt the twitch on my sleeve, and turned, and loved the first sight I had of that pretty face, which need never blush, I am sure, though it 's very becoming the blush too. So good-natured, you know, Lady Cecilia, it was, when nobody was looking, and before any body was the wiser. Not like some young ladies, or old even, that would have *shewed one up*, rather

than help one out in any pin's point of a difficulty."

Lady Cecilia herself was included in Lady Bearcroft's good graces, for she liked that winning way, and saw there was real good-nature there, too. She opened to both friends cordially, *à propos* to some *love* of a lace trimming. Of lace she was a famous judge, and she went into details of her own good bargains, with histories of her expeditions into the extremity of the city in search of cheap goods and unheard-of wonders at prime cost, in regions unknown. She told how it was her clever way to leave her carriage and her *people*, and go herself down narrow streets, "where the gilt chariot never marked the way," — alleys, where only wheelbarrows and herself could go; she boasted of her feats in diving into dark dens in search of run goods, charming things — French warranted—that could be had for next to nothing, and in exemplification, shewed the fineness of her embroidered cambric handkerchiefs, and told their price to a farthing!

Lady Masham's "Wonderful!" was worthy of any Jesuit, male or female, that ever existed.

From her amazing bargains, the lady of the law-knight went on to smuggling; and, as she got into spirits, talking loudly, she told of some amber satin, a whole piece capitally got over in an old gentleman's "Last Will and Testament," tied up with red tape so nicely, and sealed and superscribed and all, got through untouched!

"But a better thing I did myself," continued she; "the last trip I made to Paris — coming back, I set at defiance all the searchers, and *stabbers*, and Custom-house officers of both nations. I had hundreds of pounds worth of Valenciennes and Brussels lace hid — you would never guess where. I never told a servant—not a mortal maid even; that 's the only way; had only a confidante of a coachmaker. But when it came to packing-up time, my own maid smelt out the lace was missing; and gave notice, I am confident, to the Custom-house people to search me. So much the more glory to me. I got off clear; and, when they had stabbed the cushions, and torn the inside of my carriage all to pieces, I very coolly made them repair the mischief at their own cost.

Oh, I love to do things bravely! and away I drove triumphant with the lace, well stuffed, packed, and covered within the pole leather of the carriage they had been searching all the time."

At this period of her narrative the gentlemen came into the drawing-room. "But here comes Sir Benjamin! mum, mum! not a word more for my life! You understand, Lady Cecilia! husbands must be minded. And, let me whisper a favour — a whist-party I must beg; nothing keeps Sir Ben in good-humour so certainly as whist—when he wins, I mean."

The whist-party was made, and Lady Cecilia took care that Sir Benjamin should win, while she lost with the best grace possible. By her conciliating manners and good management in dividing to govern, all parties were arranged to general satisfaction. Mr. Harley's antipathy, the *attaché*, she settled at ecarté with Lady Masham, who found him "quite a well-mannered, pleasant person." Lady Cecilia explained to Mr. Harley, that it was her fault — her mistake entirely—that this person had been invited. Mr. Harley was now himself again,

and happy in conversation with Lady Davenant, beside whom he found his place on the sofa.

After Helen had done her duty at harp and piano-forte, Cecilia relieved her, and whispered that she might now go to her mother's sofa, and rest and be happy "Mamma's work is in some puzzle, Helen; you must go and set it to rights, my dear."

Lady Davenant welcomed her with a smile, made room for her on the sofa, and made over to her the tambour-frame; and now that Helen saw and heard Mr. Harley in his natural state, she could scarcely believe that he was the same person who had sat beside her at dinner. Animated and delightful he was now, and, what she particularly liked in him, there was no display — nothing in the Churchill style. Whenever any one came near, and seemed to wish to hear or speak, Mr. Harley not only gave them fair play, but helped them in their play. Helen observed that he possessed the art which she had often remarked in Lord Davenant, peculiar to good-natured genius — the art of drawing something good out of every body: some-

times more than they knew they had in them till it was brought out.

Even from Lord Masham, insipid and soulless though he was, as any courtier-lord in waiting could be, something was extracted; Lord Masham, universally believed to have nothing in him, was this evening surprisingly entertaining. He gave Lady Davenant a description of what he had been so fortunate as to see — the first public dinner of the King of France on his restoration, served according to all the *ci-devant* ceremonials, and in the etiquette of Louis the Fourteenth's time. Lord Masham represented in a lively manner the Marquis de Dreux, in all his antiquarian glory, going through the whole form prescribed: first, knocking with his cane at the door; then, followed by three guards with shouldered carbines, marching to buttery and hall, each and every officer of the household making reverential obeisance as they passed to the *Nef* — the *Nef* being, as Lord Masham explained to Miss Stanley, a piece of gilt plate in the shape of the hull of a ship, in which the napkins for the king's table are kept.

But why the hull of a ship should be appropriated to the royal napkins was asked?

That was beyond Lord Masham, he confessed, immediately to recollect, but he looked amazingly considerate — delicately rubbed his polished forehead with the second finger of the right hand, then regarded his ring, and turned it thrice slowly round, but the talismanic action produced nothing, and he received timely relief by a new turn given to the conversation, in which he was not, he thought, called upon to take any share — the question indeed appeared to him irrelevant, and, retiring to the card-table, he "left the discussion to abler heads."

The question was, why bow to the Nef at all?—This led to a discussion upon the advantages of ceremonials in preserving respect for order and reverence for authority, and then came an inquiry into the abuses of this real good. It was observed that the signs of the times should always be consulted, and should guide us in these things. — How far? was next to be considered. All agreed on the principle that 'order is Heaven's first law,' yet there were in the application strong shades of

difference between those who took part in the conversation.

On one side, it was thought that overturning the *tabouret* at the court of France had been the signal for the overthrow of the throne; while, on the other hand, it was suggested that a rigid adherence to forms unsuited to the temper of the times only exasperates, and that, wherever reliance on forms is implicit, it is apt to lead princes and their counsellors to depend too much on the strength of that fence which, existing only in the imagination, is powerless when the fashion changes.

In a court quite surrounded and enveloped by old forms, the light of day cannot penetrate to the interior of the palace, the eyes long kept in obscurity are weakened, so that light cannot be borne: when suddenly it breaks in, the royal captive is bewildered, and if obliged to act, he gropes, blunders, injures himself, and becomes incapable of decision in extremity of danger, reduced to the helplessness which marks the condition of the Eastern despot, or *les rois fainéans* of any time or country

As Helen sat by, listening to this conversa-

tion, what struck and interested her most was, the manner in which it went on and went off without leading to any unpleasant consequences, notwithstanding the various shades of opinion between the parties. This she saw depended much on the good sense and talents, but far more on the good breeding and temper, of those who spoke and those who listened. Time in the first place was allowed and taken for each to be understood, and no one was urged by exclamation, or misconception, or contradiction, to say more than just the thing he thought.

Lady Cecilia, who had now joined the party, was a little in pain when she heard Louis the Fourteenth's love for punctuality alluded to. She dreaded, when the General quoted "Punctuality is the virtue of princes," that Mr. Harley, with the usual impatience of genius, would have ridiculed so antiquated a notion; but, to Lady Cecilia's surprise, he even took the part of punctuality: in a very edifying manner he distinguished it from mere ceremonial etiquette —the ceremonial of the German courts, where "they lose time at breakfast, at dinner, at

supper; at court, in the ante-chamber, on the stairs, everywhere:" — punctuality was, he thought, a habit worthy to be ranked with virtues, by its effects upon the mind, the power it demands and gives of self-control, raising in us a daily, hourly sense of duty, of something that ought, that must be done, one of the best habits human creatures can have, either for their own sake or the sake of those with whom they live. And to kings and courtiers more particularly, because it gives the idea of stability—of duration; and to the aged, because it gives a sort of belief that life will last for ever.

The General had often thought this, but said he had never heard it so well expressed; he afterwards acknowledged to Cecilia that he found Mr. Harley was quite a different person from what he had expected — "He has good sense, as well as genius and good breeding. I am glad, my dear Cecilia, that you asked him here." This was a great triumph.

Towards the close of the evening, when mortals are beginning to think of bed-chamber candles, Lady Cecilia looked at the *ecarté* table,

and said to her mother, "How happy they are, and how comfortable we are! A card-table is really a necessary of life — not even music is more universally useful."

Mr. Harley said, "I doubt," and then arose between Lady Davenant and him an argument upon the comparative power in modern society of music and cards. Mr. Harley took the side of music, but Lady Davenant inclined to think that cards, in their day, and their day is not over yet, have had a wider range of influence. —"Nothing like that happy board of green cloth; it brings all intellects to one level," she said.

Mr. Harley pleaded the cause of music, which, he said, hushes all passions, calms even despair.

Lady Davenant urged the silent superiority of cards, which rests the weary talker, and relieves the perplexed courtier, and, in support of her opinion, she mentioned an old ingenious essay on cards and tea, by Pinto, she thought; and she begged that Helen would some time look for it in the library. Helen went that instant.

She searched, but could not find; where it ought to have been, there it of course was not. While she was still on the book-ladder, the door opened, and enter Lady Bearcroft.

"Miss Hanley!" cried she, "I have a word to say to you, for, though you are a stranger to me, I see you are a dear good creature, and I think I may take the liberty of asking your advice in a little matter."

Helen, who had by this time descended from the ladder, stood and looked a little surprised, but said all that was properly civil, "gratified by Lady Bearcroft's good opinion—happy to be of any service,"—&c. &c.

"Well, then—sit ye down one instant, Miss Hanley." Helen suggested that her name was Stanley.

"Stanley!—eh?—Yes, I remember. But I want to consult you, since you are so kind to allow me, on a little matter—but do sit down, I never can talk of business standing. Now I just want you, my dear Miss Hanley, to do a little job for me with Lady Davenant, who, with half an eye I can see, is a great friend of yours.—Arn't I right?"

Helen said Lady Davenant was indeed a very kind friend of hers, but still what it could be in which Lady Bearcroft expected her assistance she could not imagine.

"You need not be frightened at the word job; if that is what alarms you," continued Lady Bearcroft, "put your heart at ease, there is nothing of that sort here. It is only a compliment that I want to make, and nothing in the world expected in return for it—as it is a return in itself. But in the first place look at this cover."

She produced the envelope of a letter.

"Is this Lady Davenant's hand-writing, think you?"

She pointed to the word "*Mis-sent*," written on the corner of the cover. Helen said it was Lady Davenant's writing.

"You are certain?—Well, that is odd!—Mis-sent! when it was directed to herself, and nobody else on earth, as you see as plain as possible—Countess Davenant, surely that is right enough?"

Then opening a red morocco case she shewed a magnificent diamond Sevigné.

"Observe now," she continued, "these diamonds are so big, my dear Miss Hanley—Stanley, they would have been quite out of my reach, only for that late French invention, which maybe you may not have heard of, nor should I, but for the hint of a friend at Paris, who is in the jewellery line. The French, you must know, have got the art of sticking small di'monds together so as to make little worthless ones into large, so that, as you see, you would never tell the difference; and as it was a new discovery, and something ingenious and scientific, and Lady Davenant being reported to be a scientific lady, as well as political and influential, and all that, I thought it a good opportunity, and a fine excuse for paying her a compliment, which I had long wished to pay, for she was once on a time very kind to Sir Ben, and got him appointed to his present station; and though Lord Davenant was the ostensible person, I considered her as the prime mover behind the curtain. Accordingly, I sat me down, and wrote as pretty a note as I could pen, and Sir Ben approved of the whole thing;

but I don't say that I 'm positive he was as off-handed and clean-hearted in the matter as I was, for between you and I his gratitude, as they say of some people's, is apt to squint with one eye to the future as well as one to the past —you comprehend?"

Helen was not clear that she comprehended all that had been said; still less had she any idea what she could have to do in this matter; she waited for further explanation.

"Now all I want from you then, Miss Hanley —Stanley I would say, I beg pardon, I 'm the worst at proper names that lives— but all I want of you, Miss Hanley, is — first, your opinion as to the validity of the hand-writing, — well, you are positive, then, that this *mis-sent* is *her* hand. Now then, I want to know, do you think Lady Davenant knew what she was about when she wrote it?"

Helen's eyes opened to their utmost power of distension, at the idea of anybody's questioning that Lady Davenant knew what she was about.

"La! my dear," said Lady Bearcroft;

" spare the whites of your eyes, I didn't mean she didn't know what she was about in *that* sense."

" What sense ?" said Helen.

" Not in any particular sense," replied Lady Bearcroft. - " But let me go on, or we shall never come to an understanding; I only meant that her ladyship might have just sat down to answer my note, as I often do myself, without having read the whole through, or before I have taken it in quite."

Helen thought this very unlikely to have happened with Lady Davenant.

" But still it might have happened," continued Lady Bearcroft, " that her ladyship did not notice the delicacy of the way in which the thing was *put* — for it really was put so that nobody could take hold of it against any of us — you understand; and after all, such a curiosity of a Sevigné as this, and such fine ' di'monds,' was too pretty, and too good a thing to be refused hand-over-head, in that way Besides my note was so respectable, and respectful, it surely required and demanded something more of an answer, methinks,

from a person of my birth or education, than the single bald word "mis-sent," like the postman! Surely, Miss Hanley, now, putting your friendship apart, candidly you must think as I do? And, whether or no, at least you will be so obliging to do me the favour to find out from Lady Davenant if she really made the reply with her eyes open or not, and really meant what she said."

Helen being quite clear that Lady Davenant always meant what she said, and had written with her eyes open, declined, as perfectly useless, making the proposed inquiry. It was plain that Lady Davenant had not thought proper to accept of this present, and to avoid any unpleasant explanations, had presumed it was not intended for her, but had been sent by mistake. Helen advised her to let the matter rest.

"Well, well!" said Lady Bearcroft, "thank you, Miss Hanley, at all events for your good advice. But, neck or nothing, I am apt to go through with whatever I once take into my head, and, since you cannot aid and abet, I will trouble you no further, only not to say a

word of what I have mentioned. But all the time I thank you, my dear young lady, as much as if I took your dictum. So, my dear Miss Hanley — Stanley— do not let me interrupt you longer in your book-hunt. Take care of that stepladder, though ; it is *coggledy*, as I observed when you came down — Good night, good night."

CHAPTER X.

"My dear Helen, there is an end of everything!" cried Lady Cecilia, the next day, bursting into Helen's room, and standing before her with an air of consternation. "What has brought things to this sad pass, I know not," continued she, "for, but an hour before, I left everybody in good-humour with themselves — all in good train. But now——"

"What?" said Helen, "for you have not given me the least idea of what has happened."

"Because I have not the least idea myself, my dear. All I know is, that something has gone wrong, dreadfully! between my mother and Lady Bearcroft. Mamma would not tell me what it is; but her indignation is at such a height she declares she will not see that *woman* again: — positively will not come forth from her chamber as long as Lady Bearcroft remains

in the house. So there is a total break-up — and I wish I had never meddled with anything. O that I had never brought together these unsuitabilities, these incompatibilities! Oh, Helen! what shall I do?"

Quite pale, Lady Cecilia stood, really in despair; and Helen did not know what to advise.

"Do you know anything about it, Helen, for you look as if you did?"

An abrupt knock at the door interrupted them, and, without waiting for permission, in came Lady Bearcroft, as if blown by a high wind, looking very red: half angry, half frightened, and then laughing, she exclaimed — "A fine *boggle-de-botch* I have made of it!" But seeing Lady Cecilia, she stopped short — "Beg pardon — thought you were by yourself, Miss Hanley."

Lady Cecilia instantly offered to retire, yet intimated, as she moved towards the door, a wish to stay, and, if it were not too much, to ask what was meant by——

"By *boggle-de-botch*, do you mean?" said Lady Bearcroft. I am aware it is not a canonical word — classical, I mean; nor in nor out

of any dictionary perhaps — but when people are warm, they cannot stand picking terms."

"Certainly not," said Lady Cecilia; "but what is the matter? I am so sorry anything unpleasant has occurred."

"Unpleasant indeed!" cried Lady Bearcroft; "I have been treated actually like a dog, while paying a compliment too, and a very handsome compliment, beyond contradiction. Judge for yourself, Lady Cecilia, if this Sevigné is to be *sneezed at?*"

She opened the case; Lady Cecilia said the diamonds were certainly very handsome, but——

"But!" repeated Lady Bearcroft, "I grant you there may be a but to everything in life; still it might be said civilly, as you say it, Lady Cecilia, or looked civilly, as you look it, Miss Hanley: and if that had been done, instead of being affronted, I might after all have been well enough pleased to pocket my diamonds; but nobody can without compunction pocket an affront."

Lady Cecilia was sure her mother could not mean any affront.

"Oh, I do not know what she could or could

not mean; but I will tell you what she did — all but threw the diamonds in my face."

"Impossible!" cried Helen.

"Possible — and I will shew you how, Miss Hanley. This way: just shut down the case— snap! — and across the table she threw it, just as you would deal a card in a passion, only with a Mrs. Siddons' air to boot. I beg your pardons, both ladies, for mimicking your friend and your parent, but flesh and blood could not stand that sort of style, you know, and a little wholesome mimicry breaks no bones, and is not very offensive, I hope?"

The mimicry could not indeed be very offensive, for the imitation was so utterly unlike the reality, that Lady Cecilia and Helen with difficulty repressed their smiles.

"Ladies may smile, but they would smile on the wrong sides of their pretty little mouths if they had been treated as I have been — so ignominiously. I am sure I wish I had taken your advice, Miss Hanley; but the fact was, last night I did not quite believe you: I thought you were only saying the best you could to set off a friend; for, since I have been

among the great, and indeed even when I lived with the little, I have met with so many fair copies of false countenances, that I could not help suspecting there might be something of that sort with your Lady Davenant; but I am entirely convinced all you told me is true, for I peeped quite close at her, lifted up the hood, and found there were not two faces under it — only one very angry one for my pains. But I declare I would rather see that than a double one, like my Lady Masham's, with her spermaceti smile. And after all, do you know," continued Lady Bearcroft in a right vulgarly-cordial tone — "Do you know now, really, the first anger over, I like Lady Davenant — I protest and vow, even her pride I like — it well became her — birth and all, for I hear she is straight from Charlemagne! But I was going to mention, now my recollection is coming to me, that when I began talking to her ladyship of Sir Ben's gratitude about that place she got for him, she cut me short with her queer look, and said she was sure that Lord Davenant (and if he had been the king himself, instead of only her husband, and your father, Lady Cecilia,

she could not have pronounced his name with more distinction) — she was sure, she said, that Lord Davenant would not have been instrumental in obtaining that place for Sir Benjamin Bearcroft if he had known any man more worthy of it, which indeed I did not think at the time over and above civil — for where, then, was the particular compliment to Sir Ben?"

But when Lady Bearcroft saw Lady Cecilia's anxiety and real distress at her mother's indignant resolution, she, with surprising good-humour, said—

"I wish I could settle it for you, my dear. I cannot go away directly, which would be the best move, because Sir Benjamin has business here to-day with Lord Davenant — some job of his own, which must take place of any movements of mine, he being the more worthy gender. But I will tell you what I can do, and will, and welcome. I will keep my room instead of your mother keeping her's; so you may run and tell Lady Davenant that she is a prisoner at large, with the range of the whole house, without any danger of meeting me, for I shall not stir till the carriage is at the door to

morrow morning, when she will not be up, for we will have it at six. I will tell Sir Benjamin he is in a hurry back to town, and he always is. So all is right on my part. And go you to your mother, my dear Lady Cecilia, and settle her. I am glad to see you smile again; it is a pity you should ever do anything else."

It was not long before Cecilia returned, proclaiming "Peace, peace!"

She had made such an amusing report to her mother of all that Lady Bearcroft had said and done, and purposed to do, that Lady Davenant could not help seeing the whole in a ludicrous light, felt at once that it was beneath her serious notice, and that it would be unbecoming to waste indignation upon such a person. The result was, that she commissioned Helen to release Lady Bearcroft as soon as convenient, and to inform her that an act of oblivion was passed over the whole transaction.

There had been a shower, and it had cleared up. Lady Cecilia thought the sky looked bluer, and birds sang sweeter, and the air felt pleasanter than before the storm. "Nothing like a storm," said she, "for clearing the air;

nothing like a little honest hurricane. But with Lady Masham there never is anything like a little honest hurricane. It is all still and close with an indescribable volcano-like feeling; one is not sure of what one is standing upon. Do you know, Helen," continued she, "I am quite afraid of some explosion between mamma and Lady Masham. If we came to any difficulty with her, we could not get out of it quite so well as with Lady Bearcroft, for there is no resource of heart or frankness of feeling with her. Before we all meet at dinner, I must sound mamma, and see if all is tolerably safe." And when she went this day at dressing-time with a bouquet, as was her custom, for her mother, she took Helen with her.

At the first hint of Lady Cecilia's fears, that Lady Masham could do her any mischief, Lady Davenant smiled in scorn.

"The will she may have, my dear, but she has not the power."

"She is very foolish, to be sure," said Lady Cecilia; "still she might do mischief, and there is something monstrously treacherous in that smile of her's."

"Monstrously!" repeated Lady Davenant. "No, no, my dear Cecilia; nothing monstrous. Leave to Lady Bearcroft the vulgar belief in court-bred monsters; we know there are no such things. Men and women there, as everywhere else, are what nature, education, and circumstances have made them. Once an age, once in half-a-dozen ages, Nature may make a Brinvilliers, or Art allow of a Zeluco; but, in general, monsters are mere fabulous creatures—mistakes often, from bad drawings, like the unicorn."

"Yes, mamma, yes; now I feel much more comfortable. The unicorn has convinced me," said Lady Cecilia laughing and singing

'Tis all a mere fable; there 's nothing to fear.'

"And I shall think of her henceforth as nothing but what she appears to be, a well-dressed, well-bred, fine lady. Ay — every inch a fine lady; every word, look, motion, thought, suited to that *metier*."

"That vocation," said Lady Davenant; "it is above a trade; with her it really is a sacred duty, not merely a pleasure, to be fine. She is a fine lady of the first order; nothing too professional in her manner—no obvious affectation,

for affectation in her was so early wrought into habit as to have become second nature, scarcely distinguishable from real—all easy."

"Just so, mamma; one gets on so easily with her."

"A curious illusion," continued Lady Davenant, "occurs with every one making acquaintance with such persons as Lady Masham, I have observed; perhaps it is that some sensation of the tread-mill life she leads, communicates itself to those she is talking to; which makes you fancy you are always getting on, but you never do get beyond a certain point."

"That is exactly what I feel," said Helen, "while Lady Masham speaks, or while she listens, I almost wonder how she ever existed without me!"

"Yes, and though one knows, it is all an illusion," said Lady Cecilia, "still one is pleased, knowing all the time that she cannot possibly care for one in the least; but then one does not expect everybody to care for one really; at least I know I cannot like all my acquaintance as much as my friends, much less can I love all my neighbours as myself——"

"Come, come! Cecilia!" said her mother.

"By come, come! mamma means, don't go any further, Cecilia," said she, turning to Helen. "But now, mamma, I am not clear whether you really think her your friend or your enemy, inclined to do you mischief or not. Just as it may be for her interest or not, I suppose."

"And just as it may be the fashion or not," said Lady Davenant. "I remember hearing old Lady M * * * *, one of the cleverest women of the last century, and one who had seen much of the world, say, 'If it was the fashion to burn me, and I at the stake, I hardly know ten persons of my acquaintance who would refuse to throw on a faggot.'"

"Oh mamma! — Oh Lady Davenant!" exclaimed Helen and Cecilia.

"It was a strong way of putting the matter," said Lady Davenant, laughing: — "But fashion has, I assure you, more influence over weak minds, such as Lady Masham's, than either party or interest. And since you do not like my illustration by fire, take one by water — She is just a person to go out with,

on a party of pleasure, on the smooth surface of a summer sea, and if a slight shower comes on would pity your bonnet sincerely, but if a serious squall arose and all should be in danger——"

"Then, of course, everybody would take care of themselves," interrupted Lady Cecilia, "excepting such a simpleton as Helen, who would take care of you first, mamma, of me next, and of herself last."

"I believe it — I do believe it," cried Lady Davenant, and, her eyes and thoughts fixing upon Helen, she quite forgot what further she was going to say of Lady Masham.

The perfectly unimpassioned tone, in which her mother had discussed this lady's character, even the candour, convinced Lady Cecilia as well as Helen, that nothing further could be done as to drawing them together. No condescension of manner, no conciliation, could be expected from Lady Davenant towards Lady Masham, but at the same time there was no fear of any rupture. And to this humble consolation was Lady Cecilia brought. She told Helen that she gave up all hope of doing any

good, she would now be quite content if she avoided doing harm, and if this visit ended without coming to any further outrage on the part of Lady Bearcroft, and without her mother's being *guilty of contempt* to Lady Masham. She had done some little service, however, with respect to the ambassadress, and her mother knew it. It was well known that the ambassadress governed the ambassador, and Lady Cecilia had quite won her heart, "so that he will be assuredly a friend to papa. Indeed, this has been almost promised. Madame l'Ambassadrice assured me that her husband looks upon Lord Davenant as one of the first sages of England, that is to say, of Europe; and she says he is well acquainted with all Lord Davenant's works —and it is my belief," concluded Lady Cecilia, "that all Sir William Davenant's works go with her to papa's credit, for as she spoke she gave a polite glance towards the bookcase where she saw their gilded backs, and I found the ambassador himself, afterwards, with 'Davenant on Trade' in his hand! Be it so; it is not after all, you know, robbing the dead, only inheriting by mistake from a namesake, which

with foreigners is allowable, because impossible to avoid, from the time of '*Monsieur Robinson parent apparemment de M. Crusoe?*' to the present day."

By dint of keeping well asunder those who would not draw well together, Lady Cecilia did contrive to get through the remaining morning of this operose visit; some she sent out to drive with gallant military outriders to see places in the neighbourhood famed for this or that; others walked or boated, or went through the customary course of conservatories, pheasantry, flower-garden, pleasure-grounds, and best views of Clarendon Park — and billiards always.

The political conferences were held in Lord Davenant's apartment: to what these conferences tended we never knew and never shall; we consider them as matters of history, and leave them with due deference to the historian; we have to do only with biography. Far be it from us to meddle with politics — we have quite enough to do with manners and morality.

CHAPTER XI.

THE next day, as Helen was going across the hall, she saw the members of the last political conclave coming out of Lord Davenant's room, each looking as if the pope had not been chosen according to his wish — dark and disappointed; even Mr. Harley's radiant countenance was dimmed, and the dry symptomatic cough which he gave after taking leave of Lady Davenant convinced Helen that all was not well within.

He departed, and there seemed to be among those who remained a greater constraint than ever. There appeared to be in each an awakened sense that there were points on which they could never agree; all seemed to feel how different it would have been if Mr. Harley had remained.

True, the absence or presence of a person of

genius makes as much difference in the whole appearance of things, as sunshine or no sunshine on the landscape.

Dinner, however, was got through, for time and the hour, two hours, or three, will get through the roughest dinner or the smoothest.

"Never saw a difficult dinner-party better bothered!" was Lady Bearcroft's compliment, whispered to Cecilia as they went into the drawing-room; and Helen, notwithstanding Lady Bearcroft's vulgarity, could not help beginning absolutely to like her for her good-nature and amazingly prompt sympathy; but, after all, good-nature without good-manners is but a blundering ally, dangerous to its best friend.

This evening, Lady Cecilia felt that every one was uncomfortable, and, flitting about the room, she touched here and there to see how things were going on. They were not going on well, and she could not make them better; even her efforts at conciliation were ineffectual: she had stepped in between her mother, some of the gentlemen, and the General, in an argument in which she heard indications of strife,

and she set about to explain away contradictions, and to convince everybody that they were really all of the same opinion.

With her sweet voice and pretty persuasive look, this might have done for the General, as a relaxing smile seemed to promise; but it would not do at all with Lady Davenant, who, from feelings foreign to the present matter, was irritated, and spoke, as Helen thought, too harshly.

"Cecilia, you would act *Harmony* in the comedy to perfection; but, unfortunately, I am not one of those persons who can be persuaded that when I say one thing I mean quite another — probably, because it is not my practice so to do. That old epigram, Sir Benjamin, do you know it," continued she, "which begins with a bankrupt's roguish '*Whereas?*'

'Whereas the religion and fate of three nations
Depend on th' importance of our conversations:
Whereas some objections are thrown in our way,
And words have been construed to mean what they say, —
Be it known from henceforth to each friend and each brother,
Whene'er we *say* one thing we *mean* quite another.'"

Sir Benjamin gravely remarked that it was good law practice. The courts themselves

would be shut up if some such doctrine were not understood in the practice there, *subaudito*, if not publicly proclaimed with an absolute "Whereas be it known from henceforth."

Whether this was dry humour of Sir Benjamin's, or plain matter of fact and serious opinion, the gravity with which it was delivered indicated not; but it produced the good effect of a smile, a laugh, at him or with him. Lady Cecilia did not care which, the laugh was good at all events; her invincible good-nature and sweetness of temper had not been soured or conquered even by her mother's severity; and Lady Davenant, observing this, forgave and wished to be forgiven.

"My dearest Cecilia," said she, "clasp this bracelet for me, will you? It would really be a national blessing if, in the present times, all women were as amiable as you,

'Fond to spread friendships, but to cover heats.'"

Then, turning to a French gentleman, she spoke of the change she had observed when she was last at Paris, from the overwhelming violence of party spirit on all sides.

"Dreadfully true," the French gentleman

replied — "party spirit, taking every Proteus form, calling itself by a hundred names and with a thousand devices and watchwords, which would be too ridiculous, if they were not too terrible — domestic happiness destroyed, all society disordered, disorganized — literature not able to support herself, scarcely appearing in company — all precluded, superseded by the politics of the day."

Lady Davenant joined with him in his regrets, and added, that she feared society in England would soon be brought to the same condition.

"No," said the French gentleman, "English ladies will never be so vehement as my countrywomen; they will never become, I hope, like some of our lady politicians, '*qui heurlent comme des demons.*'"

Lady Cecilia said that, from what she had seen at Paris, she was persuaded that if the ladies did bawl too loud it was because the gentlemen did not listen to them; that above half the party-violence which appeared in Parisian belles was merely dramatic, to produce a sensation, and draw the gentlemen, from the

black *pelotons* in which they gathered, back to their proper positions round the *fauteuils* of the fair ladies.

The foreigner, speaking to what he saw passing in Lady Davenant's mind, went on; — "Ladies can do much, however, in this as in all other dilemmas, where their power is, and ought to be, omnipotent."

"Female *influence* is and ought to be *potent*," said the General, with an emphasis on influence, contradistinguishing it from power, and reducing the exaggeration of omnipotent by the short process of lopping off two syllables.

"So long as ladies keep in their own proper character," said Lady Davenant, "all is well; but, if once they cease to act as women, that instant they lose their privilege — their charm; they forfeit their exorcising power; they can no longer command the demon of party nor themselves, and he transforms them directly, as you say," said she to the French gentleman, "into actual furies."

"And, when so transformed, sometimes unconscious of their state," said the General, drily, his eye glancing towards the other end of

the room, and lighting upon Lady Bearcroft, who was at the instant very red and very loud; and Lady Cecilia was standing, as if watchful for a moment's pause, in which to interpose her word of peace. She waited for some time in vain, for when she hastened from the other end of the room to this—the scene of action, things had come to such a pass between the ladies Masham and Bearcroft, that mischief, serious mischief, must have ensued, had not Lady Cecilia, at utmost need, summoned to her aid the happy genius of Nonsense — the genius of Nonsense — that little western, eastern, southern, northern sprite, in whose elfin power even Love delights; on whom Reason herself condescends often to smile, even when Logic frowns, and chops him on his block: but, cut in twain, the ethereal spirit soon unites again, and lives, and laughs, and cheats even Hate of a grim smile, and with party spirit in utmost fury prevents many a deadly blow.

But mark him well—this little happy genius of Nonsense; see that he be the true thing—the genuine spirit. You will know him by his well-bred air and tone, which none can counterfeit;

and by his smile; for while most he makes others laugh, the arch little rogue seldom goes beyond a smile himself! Graceful in the midst of all his pranks, he never goes too far — though far enough he has been known to go — he has crept into the armour of the great hero, convulsed the senate in the wig of a chancellor, and becomingly, decorously, put on now and then the mitre of an archbishop.

"If good people," said Archbishop Usher, "would but make goodness agreeable, and smile, instead of frowning in their virtue, how many they would win to the good cause!"

Lady Cecilia in this was good at need, and, at her utmost need, obedient to her well-bred call, came this happy little genius, and brought with him song and dance, riddle and charade, and comic prints; and on a half-opened parcel of books Cecilia darted, and produced a Comic Annual, illustrated by him whom no risible muscles can resist. All smiled who understood, and mirth admitted of her crew all who smiled, and party-spirit fled. But there were foreigners present. Foreigners cannot well understand our local allusions; our Cruikshanks is to

them unintelligible, and Hood's "Sorrows of Number One" quite lost upon them. Then Lady Bearcroft thought she would do as much as Lady Cecilia, and more—that she would produce what these poor foreigners could comprehend. But not at her call came the genius of lively nonsense, for she called not in well-bred tone, and he heard her not.

In his stead came that counterfeit, who thinks it witty to be rude:

> "And placing raillery in railing,
> Will tell aloud your greatest failing—"

that vulgar imp yclept FUN—known by his broad grin, by his loud tone, and by his rude banter. Head foremost forcing himself in, came he, and brought with him a heap of coarse caricatures, and they were party caricatures.

"Capital!" Lady Bearcroft, however, pronounced them, as she spread all upon the table for applause—but no applause ensued.

Not such, these, as real good English humour produces and enjoys, independently of party—these were all too broad, too coarse. Lady Davenant despised, the General detested, Helen

turned away, and Lady Cecilia threw them under the table, that they might not be seen by the foreigners. "For the honour of England, do not let them be spread abroad pray, Lady Bearcroft."

"The world is grown mighty nice!" said Lady Bearcroft; "for my part, give me a good laugh when it is to be had."

"Perhaps we shall find one here," said Lady Cecilia, opening a portfolio of caricatures in a different style, but they were old, and Lady Bearcroft would have thrown them aside; but Lord Davenant observed that, if they have lasted so long, they must be good, because their humour only can ensure their permanence; the personality dies with the person: for instance, in the famous old print of the minister ratcatcher, in the Westminster election, the likeness to each rat of the day is lost to us, but the ridicule on placemen ratters remains. The whole, however, is perfectly incomprehensible to foreigners.

"Rats! rat!" repeated one of the foreigners, as he looked at and studied the print. It

was amusing to see the gravity with which this foreign diplomatist, quite new to England, listened to Lady Bearcroft's explanation of what is meant in English by a *rat political.* She was at first rather good on this topic, professing a supernatural acuteness of the senses, arising from an unconquerable antipathy, born with her, to the whole race of *rats.* She declared that she could see a rat a mile off in any man — could, from the moment a man opened his mouth in Parliament, or on the hustings, prophesy whether he would turn into a rat at last, or not. She, moreover, understood the language of rats of every degree, and knew even when they said " No," that they meant " Yes," — two monosyllables, the test of rats, which betray them all sooner or later, and transform the biped into the quadruped, who then turns tail, and runs always to the other side, from whatever side he may be of.

The *chargé-d'affaires* stood in half bow, lending deferential ear and serious attention the whole time of this lecture upon rats, without being able from beginning to end to compass

its meaning, and at the close, with a disconsolate shrug, he exclaimed, "*Ah! Je renonce à ça*——"

Lady Bearcroft went on — "Since I cannot make your Excellency understand by description what I mean by an English rat-political, I must give you an example or two, dead and living — living best, and I have more than one noted and branded rat in my eye."

But Lady Cecilia, anxious to interrupt this perilous business, hastily rang for wine and water; and as the gentlemen went to help themselves she gave them a general toast, as sitting down to the piano-forte, to the tune of —

"Here 's to the maiden of blushing fifteen"—

She sang—

"Here 's to rats and ratcatchers of every degree,
The rat that is trapped, and the rat that is free,
The rat that is shy, sir, the rat that is bold, sir,
The rat upon sale, sir, the rat that is sold, sir.
Let the rats rat! Success to them all,
And well off to the old ones before the wall fall!"

And thus the evening ended playfully

CHAPTER XII.

SIR BENJAMIN and Lady Bearcroft departed at six o'clock the next morning, and all the rest of the political and diplomatic corps *left* immediately after breakfast.

Lady Davenant looked relieved, the General satisfied, and Lady Cecilia consoled herself with the hope that, if she had done no good, she had not done any harm. This was a bad slide, perhaps, in the magic lantern, but would leave no trace behind.

She began now to be very impatient for Beauclerc's appearance; always sanguine, and as rapid in her conclusions as she was precipitate in her actions, she felt no doubt, no anxiety, as to the future; for, though she refrained from questioning Helen as to her sentiments for Beauclerc, she was pretty well satisfied on that subject. Helen was particularly grateful

to Lady Cecilia for this forbearance, being almost ashamed to own, even to herself, how exceedingly happy she felt; and now that it was no longer wrong in her to love, or dishonourable in him to wish to be loved, she was surprised to find how completely the idea of Beauclerc was connected with and interwoven through all her thoughts, pursuits, and sentiments. He had certainly been constantly in her company for several months, a whole summer, but she could scarcely believe that during this time he could have become so necessary to her happiness. While, with still increasing agitation, she looked forward to his arrival, she felt as if Lady Davenant's presence was a sort of protection, a something to rely on, in the new circumstances in which she was to be placed. Lord Davenant had returned to town, but Lady Davenant remained. The Russian embassy seemed still in abeyance.

One morning as Helen was sitting in Lady Davenant's room alone with her, she said suddenly:

"At your age, Helen, I had as little taste for what are called politics as you have, yet you

see what I am come to, and by the same road you may, you will, arrive at the same point."

"I! oh, I hope not!" cried Helen, almost before she felt the whole inference that might be drawn from this exclamation.

"You hope not?" repeated her ladyship calmly. "Let us consider this matter rationally, and put our hopes, and our fears, and our prejudices, out of the question, if possible. Let me observe to you, that the position of women in society, is somewhat different from what it was a hundred years ago, or as it was sixty, or I will say thirty years since. Women are now so highly cultivated, and political subjects are at present of so much importance, of such high interest, to all human creatures who live together in society, you can hardly expect, Helen, that you, as a rational being, can go through the world as it now is, without forming any opinion on points of public importance. You cannot, I conceive, satisfy yourself with the common namby-pamby little missy phrase, 'ladies have nothing to do with politics.'"

Helen blushed, for she was conscious that,

wrong or right, namby-pamby, little missy, or not, she had hitherto satisfied herself very comfortably with some such thought.

"Depend upon it, Helen," resumed Lady Davenant, "that, when you are married, your love for a man of superior abilities, and of superior character, must elevate your mind to sympathy with all his pursuits, with all the subjects which claim his attention."

Helen felt that she must become strongly interested in every subject in which the man she loved was interested; but still she observed that she had not abilities or information, like Lady Davenant's, that could justify her in attempting to follow her example. Besides, Helen was sure that, even if she had, it would not suit her taste; and besides, in truth, she did not think it well suited to a woman — she stopped when she came to that last thought. But what kindness and respect suppressed was clearly understood by her penetrating friend. Fixing her eyes upon Helen, she said with a smile, the candour and nobleness of her character rising above all little irritation of temper,

"I agree with you, my dear Helen, in all you do *not* say, and were I to begin life over again, my conduct should in some respects be different. Of the public dangers and private personal inconveniences that may result from women becoming politicians, or, as you better express our meaning, interfering with public affairs, no one can be more aware than I am. *Interfering*, observe I say, for I would mark and keep the line between influence and interference. Female influence must, will, and ought to exist on political subjects as on all others; but this influence should always be domestic, not public —the customs of society have so ruled it. Of the thorns in the path of ambitious men all moralists talk, but there are little, scarcely visible, thorns of a peculiar sort that beset the path of an ambitious woman, the venomous prickles of the *domestic bramble*, a plant not perhaps mentioned in Withering's Botany, or the Hortus Kewensis, but it is too well known to many, and to me it has been sorely known."

At this instant General Clarendon came in with some letters, which had been forwarded to him express. One, for Lady Davenant, he had

been desired to put into her hands himself: he retired, and Lady Davenant opened the letter. By the first glance at her countenance, Helen saw that there was something in it which had surprised and given her great concern. Helen withdrew her eyes, and waited till she should speak.

But Lady Davenant was quite silent, and Helen, looking at her again, saw her put her hand to her heart, as if from some sudden sense of violent bodily pain, and she sank on the sofa, fell back, and became as pale as death, and motionless. Excessively frightened, Helen threw open the window, rang the bell for Lady Davenant's own woman, and sent the page for Lady Cecilia.

In a few moments Lady Cecilia and Elliott came. Neither was as much alarmed as Helen had expected they would be. They had seen Lady Davenant, under similar attacks — they knew what remedies to apply. Elliott was a remarkably composed, steady person. She now went on doing all that was necessary without speaking a word. The paroxysm lasted longer than usual, as Lady Cecilia observed; and, though she continued her assurances to Helen

that "It was all nervous—only nerves," she began evidently to be herself alarmed. At length symptoms of returning animation appeared, and then Cecilia retired, beckoning to Helen to follow her into the next room.

"We had better leave mamma to Elliott, she will be happier if she thinks we know nothing of the matter." Then, recollecting that Helen had been in the room when this attack came on, she added — "But no, you must go back, for mamma will remember that you were present—take as little notice, however, as possible of what has happened."

Cecilia said that her mother, when they were abroad, had been subject to such seizures at intervals, "and in former times, before I was born I believe," said Lady Cecilia, "she had some kind of extraordinary disease in the heart; but she has a particular aversion to being thought nervous. Every physician who has ever pronounced her nervous has always displeased her, and has been dismissed. She was once quite vexed with me for barely suggesting the idea. There," cried Cecilia, "I hear her voice, go to her."

Helen followed Lady Cecilia's suggestion, and took as little notice as possible of what had happened. Elliott disappeared as she entered—the page was waiting at the door, but to Helen's satisfaction Lady Davenant did not admit him.

"Not yet; tell him I will ring when I want him," said she.

The door closed: and Lady Davenant, turning to Helen, said,

"Whether I live or die is a point of some consequence to the friends who love me; but there is another question, Helen, of far more importance to me, and, I trust, to them. That question is, whether I continue to live as I have lived, honoured and respected, or live and die dishonoured and despised,"—her eye glanced towards the letter she had been reading.

"My poor child," continued Lady Davenant, looking at Helen's agitated countenance, — "My poor child, I will not keep you in suspense."

She then told Helen that she was suspected of having revealed a secret of state that had been confided to her husband, and which it was

supposed, and truly supposed, that Lord Davenant had told to her. Beyond its political importance, the disclosure involved a charge of baseness, in her having betrayed confidence, having suffered a copy of a letter from an illustrious personage to be handed about and read by several people.

"Lord Davenant as yet knows nothing of this, the effect upon him is what I most dread. I cannot shew you this," continued she, opening again the letter she had just received, "because it concerns others as well as myself. I am, at all events, under obligations that can never be forgotten to the person who gave me this timely notice, which could no otherwise have reached me, and the person to whom I am thus obliged is one, Helen, whom neither you nor I like, and whom Cecilia particularly dislikes—Miss Clarendon! Her manner of doing me this service is characteristic: she begins,

"'Miss Clarendon is aware that Lady Davenant has no liking for her, but that shall not prevent Miss Clarendon from doing what she thinks an act of justice towards a noble cha-

racter falsely attacked.'"—Lady Davenant read no more.

"Had not you better wait till you are stronger, my dear Lady Davenant?" said Helen, seeing her prepare to write.

"It was once said, gloriously well," replied Lady Davenant, "that the duties of life are more than life itself—so I think."

While she wrote, Helen thought of what she had just heard, and she ventured to interrupt Lady Davenant to ask if she had formed any idea of the means by which the secret could have been betrayed—or the copy of the letter obtained.

"Yes, she had a suspicion of one person, the diplomatist to whom Mr. Harley had shewn such a mortal antipathy She recollected that the last morning the *Congress* had sat in Lord Davenant's cabinet, she had left her writing-desk there, and this letter was in it; she thought that she had locked the desk when she had left the room, it certainly was fast when she returned, but it had a spring Bramah lock, and its being shut down would have fastened it. She had no proof one way

or other, her suspicion rested where was her instinctive dislike. It was remarkable, however, that she at once did justice to another person whom she did not like, Mr. Mapletofft, Lord Davenant's secretary. "His manners do not please me," she said, "but I have perfect confidence in his integrity."

Helen felt and admired this generous candour, but her suspicions were not of the diplomatist alone: she thought of one who might perhaps have been employed by him — Carlos the page. And many circumstances, which she recollected and put together, now strengthened this suspicion. She wondered it had not occurred to Lady Davenant; she thought it must, but that she did not choose to mention it. Helen had often heard Lady Davenant's particular friends complain that it was extremely disagreeable to them to have this boy constantly in the room, whatever might be the conversation. There was the page, either before or behind a skreen, always within hearing.

Lady Davenant said that, as Carlos was a Portuguese, and had never been in England till she had brought him over, a few months

before, he could not understand English well enough to comprehend what was going on. This was doubted, especially by Helen, who had watched his countenance, and had represented her doubts and her reasons for them to Lady Davenant, but she was not convinced.

It was one of the few points on which she could justly be reproached with adhering to her fancy instead of listening to reason. The more Carlos was attacked, the more she adhered to him. In fact, it was not so much because he was a favourite, as because he was a protegé; he was completely dependent upon her protection: she had brought him to England, had saved him from his mother, a profligate camp-follower, had freed him from the most miserable condition possible, and had raised him to easy, happy, confidential life. To the generous the having conferred an obligation is in itself a tie hard to sever. All noble-minded people believe in fidelity, and never doubt of gratitude; they throw their own souls into those they oblige, and think and feel for them, as they, in their situation, would

think and feel. Lady Davenant considered it an injustice to doubt the attachment of this boy, and a cruelty she deemed it to suspect him causelessly of being the most base of human creatures—he, a young defenceless orphan. Helen had more than once offended, by attempting to stop Lady Davenant from speaking imprudently before Carlos; she was afraid, even at this moment, to irritate her by giving utterance to her doubts; she determined, therefore, to keep them to herself till she had some positive grounds for her suspicions. She resolved to watch the boy very carefully. Presently, having finished her letters, Lady Davenant rang for him. Helen's eyes were upon Carlos the moment he entered, and her thoughts did not escape observation.

"You are wrong, Helen," said Lady Davenant, as she lighted the taper to seal her letters.

"If I am not right," said Helen, keeping her eyes upon the boy's changing countenance, "I am too suspicious—but observe, am I not right, at this instant, in thinking that his countenance is *bad?*"

Lady Davenant could not but see that countenance change in an extraordinary manner, in spite of his efforts to keep it steady.

"You cause that of which you complain," said she, going on sealing her letters deliberately. "In courts of public justice, and in private equity," the word *equity* she pronounced with an austere emphasis, "how often is the change of countenance misinterpreted. The sensibility of innocence, that cannot bear to be suspected, is often mistaken for the confusion worse confounded of guilt."

Helen observed, that, as Lady Davenant spoke, and spoke in his favour, the boy's countenance cleared up; that vacillating expression of fear, and consciousness of having something within him unwhipt of justice, completely disappeared, and his whole air was now bold and open—towards Helen, almost an air of defiance.

"What do you think is the cause of this change in his countenance—you observe it, do you not?" asked Helen.

"Yes, and the cause is as plain as the change. He sees I do not suspect him, though you do; and seeing, Helen, that he has at

least one friend in the world, who will do him justice, the orphan boy takes courage."

"I wish I could be as good as you are, my dearest Lady Davenant," said Helen; "but I cannot help still feeling, and saying,—I doubt. Now observe him, while I speak; I will turn my eyes away, that my terrible looks may not confound him. You say he knows that you do not suspect him, and that I do. How does he know it?"

"How!" said Lady Davenant. "By the universal language of the eyes."

"Not only by that universal language, I think," said Helen. "But I suspect he understands every word we say."

Helen, without ever looking up from a bunch of seals which she was rubbing bright, slowly and very distinctly added,

"I think that he can speak, read, and write English."

A change in the countenance of Carlos appeared, notwithstanding all his efforts to hold his features in the same position; instead of placid composure there was now grim rigidity.

"Give me the great seal with the coat of

arms on it," said Lady Davenant, dropping the wax on her letter, and watching the boy's eye as she spoke, without herself looking towards the seal she had described. He never stirred, and Helen began to fear she was unjust and suspicious.

But again her doubts, at least of his disposition, occurred: as she was passing through Lady Davenant's dressing-room with her, when they were going down to dinner, the page following them, Helen caught his figure in a mirror, and saw that he was making a horrible grimace at her behind her back, his dark countenance expressing extreme hatred and revenge. Helen touched Lady Davenant's arm, but, before her eye could be directed to the glass, Carlos, perceiving that he was observed, pretended to be suddenly seized with cramp in his foot, which obliged him to make these frightful contortions. Helen was shocked by his artfulness, but it succeeded with Lady Davenant: it was in vain to say more about it to her, so Helen let it pass.

When she mentioned it afterwards to Lady Cecilia, she said—"I am sorry, for your sake.

Helen, that this happened; depend upon it, that revengeful little Portuguese gnome will work you mischief some time or other."

Helen did not think of herself — indeed she could not imagine any means by which he could possibly work her woe; but the face was so horrible, that it came again and again before her eyes, and she was more and more determined to watch Carlos constantly.

This was one of the public days at Clarendon Park, on which there was a good deal of company; many of the neighbouring gentry were to be at dinner. When Lady Davenant appeared, no inquiries concerning her health were made by her daughter or by the General — no allusion to her having been unwell. She seemed quite recovered, and Helen observed that she particularly exerted herself, and that her manner was more gracious than usual to commonplace people—more present to every thing that was passing. She retired however early, and took Helen with her. The depression of her spirits, or rather the weight upon her mind, appeared again as soon as they were alone together. She took her writing-desk, and looked

over some letters which she said ought to be burned. She could not sleep in peace, she said—she ought not to sleep, till this was done. Several of these, as she looked over them, seemed to give her pain, and excited her indignation or contempt as she from time to time exclaimed—" Meanness !—corruption !—ingratitude too !—all favours forgotten ! To see —to feel—this is the common fate of all who have lived the life I have lived ; of this I am not so inconsistent as to complain. But it is hard that my own character—the integrity of a whole life — should avail me nothing ! And yet," added she, after a moment's pause of reflection, " to how few can my character be really known ! Women cannot, like men, make their characters known by public actions. I have no right to complain ; but if Lord Davenant's honour is to be——" She paused ; her thoughts seeming too painful for utterance. She completed the arrangement of the papers, and, as she pressed down the lid of her writing-box, and heard the closing sound of the lock, she said —" Now I may sleep in peace." She put out the lamp, and went to her bed-room,

carrying with her two or three books which she intended to read after she should be in bed; for, though she talked of sleeping, it was plain she thought she should not. Helen prevailed upon her to let her remain with her, and read to her.

She opened first a volume of Shakspeare, in which was Lady Davenant's mark. "Yes," said she, "read that speech of Wolsey's; read that whole scene, the finest picture of ambition ever drawn." And, after she had heard the scene, she observed that there is no proof more certain of the truth of poetic description, than its recurring to us at the time we strongly feel. "Those who tell us," continued she, "that it is unnatural to recollect poetry or eloquence at times of powerful emotion, are much mistaken; they have not strong feelings or strong imaginations. I can affirm from my own experience, that it is perfectly natural."

Lady Davenant rapidly mentioned some instances of this sort which she recollected, but seeing the anxiety of Helen's look, she added, "You are afraid that I am feverish; you wish me to rest; then, go on reading to me."

Helen read on, till Lady Davenant declared she would not let her sit up any longer. Go she must, now — "Only, before you go, my dear child, look here at what I have been looking at while you have been reading."

She made Helen place herself so as to see exactly in the same direction and light in which she was looking, and she pointed out to her, in the lining of the bed, a place where, from the falling of the folds and the crinkles in the material, a figure with the head, head-dress, and perfect profile of an old woman with a turned-up chin, appeared. At first Helen could not see it; but at last she caught it, and was struck with it. "The same sort of curious effect of chance resemblance and coincidence which painters, Leonardo da Vinci in particular, have observed in the moss and stains on old stones," observed Lady Davenant. "But it struck me to-night, Helen, perhaps because I am a little feverish — it struck me in a new point of view — moral, not picturesque. If such be the effects of chance, or of coincidence, how cautious we should be in deciding from appearances, or pronouncing from circumstan-

tial evidence upon the guilt of evil design in any human creature."

"You mean this to apply to me about Carlos?" said Helen.

"I do. But not only of him and you was I thinking, but of myself and those who judge of me falsely from coincidences, attributing to me designs which I never had and actions of which I am incapable." She suddenly raised herself in her bed, and was going to say more, but the pendule striking at that instant two o'clock, she stopped abruptly, kissed Helen, and sent her away.

Helen gathered together and carried away with her all the books, that Lady Davenant might not be tempted to look at them more. As she had several piled on one arm, and had a taper in her hand, she was somewhat encumbered, and, though she managed to open the bedroom door, and to shut it again without letting any of the books fall, and crossed the little ante-room between the bed-chamber and dressing-room safely, yet, as she was opening the dressing-room door, and taking too much or too little care of some part of her pyramid of

books, down came the whole pile with a noise which, in the stillness of the night, sounded tremendous. She was afraid it would disturb Lady Davenant, and was going back to tell her what it was, when she was startled by hearing, as she thought, the moving of a chair or table in the dressing-room; she stopped short to listen—all was silent; she thought she had mistaken the direction in which the noise came.

She softly opened the dressing-room door, and looked in—all was silent—no chair, or stool, or table overturned, everything was in its place exactly as they had left it, but there was a strong smell of a half extinguished lamp. On examining, she found that the smell came from the lamp they had left on the writing-table in the dressing-room; she thought it had been put out when they had left the room, she now supposed it had not been sufficiently lowered, she turned the screw, and took care now to see it completely extinguished; then went back for the books, and as people sometimes will, when most tired and most late, be most orderly, she would not go to bed without

putting every volume in its place in the book-case. After reaching to put one book upon the highest shelf, as she was getting down she laid her hand on the top of Lady Davenant's writing-box, and, as she leaned on it, was surprised to hear the click of its lock closing. The sound was so peculiar she could not be mistaken; besides, she thought she had felt the lid give way under her pressure. There was no key left in the lock—she perfectly recollected the very sound of that click when Lady Davenant shut the lid down before leaving the room this night. She stood looking at the lock, and considering how this could be, and as she remained perfectly still, she heard, or thought she heard some one breathing near her. Holding in her own breath, she listened and cautiously looked round without stirring from the place where she stood—one of the window curtains moved, so at least she thought—yes, certainly there was some living thing behind it. It might be Lady Davenant's great dog which sometimes came in here; but looking again at the bottom of the curtain she saw a human foot. The page,

Carlos! was her instant suspicion, and his vengeful face came before her, and a vision of a stiletto! or she did not well know what. She trembled all over; yet she had presence of mind enough to recollect that she should not seem to take notice. And, while she moved about the books on the table, she gave another look, and saw that the foot was not withdrawn. She knew she was safe still, it had not been perceived that she had seen it; now what was she to do? "Go up to that curtain and draw it back and face the boy"—but she did not dare; yet he was only a boy—But it might be a man, and not the page. Better go and call somebody — tell Lady Davenant. She MUST go through the ante-chamber, and pass close to that curtain to open the door. All this was the thought of one moment, and she went on holding up the light to the book-shelves as if in quest of some book, and kept coasting along to gain the door; she was afraid when she was to pass the window-curtain, either of touching it, or of stumbling over that foot. But she got past without touching or stumbling, opened the door, whisked through —

that was done too quickly, but she could not help it, — she shut, bolted the door, and ran across the ante-chamber to Lady Davenant's bed-room. She entered softly, aware of the danger to her of sudden alarm. But Lady Davenant was not asleep, was not alarmed, but was *effective* in a moment. First she asked :

" Did you lock the door after you ?"

" Yes, bolted it."

" That is well."

Neither of them said " Who do you think it is ?" But each knew what the other thought. They returned through the ante-chamber to the dressing-room. But when they opened the door, all was quiet — no one behind the curtain, no one in the room — they searched under the sofas, everywhere ; there was no closet or hiding-place in which any one could be concealed. The window fastenings were unstirred. But the door into the gallery was unlocked, and the simple thing appeared — that Helen, in her confusion, had thought only of fastening the door into the ante-chamber, which also opened on the gallery, but had totally forgotten to lock that from the dressing-room

into the gallery, by which whoever had been in the room had escaped without any difficulty.

Lady Davenant rather inclined to believe that no one had been there, and that it was all Helen's imagination. But Helen persisted that she had seen what she had seen, and heard what she had heard. They went into the gallery—all silence, no creature visible, and the doors at the ends of the gallery locked outside.

After a fruitless search they retired, Lady Davenant to her own room, and Helen to hers, full of shame and regret that she had not had the courage to open the curtain at the right moment. Nothing could stir her belief, however, in the evidence of her senses; the boy must have been there, and must be still concealed somewhere in the gallery, or in some of the rooms opening into it. Some of these were unoccupied, but they were all locked up, as Lady Davenant had told her when she had proposed searching them; one or two they tried and found fastened. She stood at her own door, after having put down the candle on her table, still giving a lingering look-out, when, through the darkness in the gallery at

the further end, she saw a ray of light on the floor, which seemed to come from under the door of a room unoccupied—Mr. Mapletofft's room; he had gone to town with Lord Davenant. Helen went on tiptoe very softly along the gallery, almost to this door, and still she saw this ray of light, and it did come from under that door, and she stood still and considered what she should do now—"Go again to Lady Davenant?"——

But at that moment the door opened, and the page stood before her, the lamp in his hand shining full on his face and on hers. Both started—then both were motionless for one second—but he, recovering instantly, shot back again into the room, flung to the door, and locked it.

"Seen him!" cried Lady Davenant, when Helen flew to her room and told her; "seen him! do you say?" and then ringing her bell, she bade Helen run and knock at the General's door, while she went herself to Mr. Mapletofft's room, commanding Carlos to open the door immediately. But he would not open it, nor make any answer; the servants came, and the

General ordered one to go round to the windows of the room lest the boy should escape that way. It was too late, he had escaped; when the door was forced, one of the windows was found open; Carlos was not in the room; he must have swung himself down from the height by means of a tree which was near the window. The lamp was still burning, and papers half burnt smouldering on the table. There were sufficient remains to tell what they had been. Lady Davenant saw, in the handwriting of Carlos, copies of letters taken from her desk. One half unburnt cover of the packet he had been making up, shewed by its direction to whom it was to have been sent, and there were a few lines in the boy's own writing withinside, addressed to his employer, which revealed the whole. His employer was, as Lady Davenant had suspected — the Diplomatist!

A duplicate Bramah key was found under the table, and she recollected that she had some months ago missed this duplicate key of her desk, and supposed she had dropped it from her watch-ring while out walking; she recol-

lected, further, that Carlos had with great zeal assisted her in the search for it all through the shrubbery walks. The proofs of this boy's artifice and long-premeditated treachery, accumulating upon Lady Davenant, shocked her so much that she could not think of anything else.

"Is it possible? is it in human nature?" she exclaimed. "Such falsehood, such art, such ingratitude!"

As she fixed her eyes upon the writing, scarcely yet dry, she repeated. "It *is* his writing — I see it, yet can scarcely believe it! I, who taught him to write myself — guided that little hand to make the first letters that he ever formed! And this is in human nature! I could not have conceived it — it is dreadful to be so convinced, it lowers one's confidence in one's fellow-creatures. That is the worst of all!"

She sighed deeply, and then, turning to Helen, said, "But let us think no more of it to-night, we can do no more, they are in pursuit of him; I hope I may never, never, see him more."

CHAPTER XIII.

SOME people value their friends most for active service, some for passive kindness. Some are won by tender expressions, some convinced by solid proofs of regard; others of a yet nobler kind, and of this sort was Lady Davenant, are apt to be best pleased, most touched, by proofs that their own character has been thoroughly understood, and that they have justly appreciated the good qualities of their friend. More than by all the kindness and sympathy Helen had ever before shown her was she now pleased and touched by the respect for her feelings in this affair of the page. Helen never having at the moment of his detection nor afterwards, by word or look, indulged in the self-triumph of "You see how right I was!" which implies, "You see how wrong you were!"

On the contrary, she gave what comfort she honestly could by shewing that she knew from what humane motives and generous feelings Lady Davenant had persisted in supporting this boy to the last.

As to the little wretch himself, he appeared no more. Search was made for him in every direction, but he was not to be found, and Helen thought it was well that Lady Davenant should be spared the pain of seeing or hearing more about him.

The whole mystery was now solved, the difficulty for Lady Davenant in a fair way to be ended. She had felt an instinctive aversion to the fawning tone of the diplomatist, whom she had suspected of caballing against Lord Davenant secretly, and it was now proved that he had been base beyond what she could have conceived possible; had been in confederacy with this boy, whom he had corrupted, purchasing from him copies of private letters, and bribing him to betray his benefactress. The copy of that letter from an illustrious personage had been thus obtained. The proofs now brought home to the guilty person, deprived him at

once of all future means of injuring Lord Davenant. Completely in their power, he would be ready to ensure silence at any price, and, instead of caballing further, this low intriguer would now be compelled to return from whence he came, too happy to be permitted to retreat from his situation, and quit England without being brought to public disgrace. No notice of the report that had been in private circulation against Lady Davenant having yet appeared in the public prints, it was possible to prevent the mischief that even the mention of her name in such an affair must have occasioned. It was necessary, however, that letters should be written immediately to the different persons whom the private reports had reached; and Helen and her daughter trembled for her health in consequence of this extreme hurry and fatigue, but she repeated her favourite maxim — "Better to wear out, than to rust out," — and she accomplished all that was to be done. Lord Davenant wrote in triumph that all was settled, all difficulties removed, and they were to set out for Russia immediately.

And now Lady Davenant breathed freely. Relieved from the intolerable thought that the base finger of suspicion could point at her or at Lord Davenant, her spirits rose, her whole appearance renovated, and all the fears that Helen and her daughter had felt lest she should not be able to sustain the hardships of a long voyage and the rigour of a northern climate, were now completely dispelled.

The day of departure was fixed — Lady Davenant remained, however, as long as she possibly could with her daughter ; and she was anxious, too, to see Granville Beauclerc before she left Clarendon Park.

The number of the days of quarantine were gone over every morning at breakfast by Lady Cecilia and the General; they looked in the papers carefully for the arrivals at the hotel which Beauclerc usually frequented. This morning, in reading the list aloud, the General came to the name of Sir Thomas D'Aubigny, brother to the Colonel. The paragraph stated that Colonel D'Aubigny had left some manuscripts to his brother, which would soon be

published, and then followed some puff in the usual style, which the General did not think it necessary to read. But one of the officers, who knew some of the D'Aubignys, went on talking of the Colonel, and relating various anecdotes to prove that his souvenirs would be amusing.

Helen, who was conscious that she always blushed when Colonel D'Aubigny's name was mentioned, and that the General had observed it, was glad that he never looked up from what he was reading, and when she had courage to turn towards her, she admired Cecilia's perfect self-possession.

Beauclerc's name was not among the arrivals, and it was settled consequently that they should not see him this day.

Some time after they had left the breakfast-room, Helen found Lady Davenant in her own apartment, sitting, as it was very unusual with her, perfectly unemployed — her head leaning on her hand, and an expression of pain in her countenance.

"Are not you well, my dear Lady Davenant?" Helen asked.

"My mind is not well," she replied, "and

that always affects my body, and I suppose my looks."

After a moment's silence she fixed her eyes on Helen, and said, "You tell me that Colonel D'Aubigny never was a lover—never was an admirer of yours?"

"Never!" said Helen, low, but very decidedly. Lady Davenant sighed, but did not speak.

After a longer continuance of silence than had almost ever occurred when they two were alone together, Lady Davenant looked up, and said,

"I hope in God that I am mistaken. I pray that I may never live to see it!"

"To see what?" cried Helen.

"To see that one little black spot, invisible to you, Helen, the speck of evil in that heart—my daughter's heart—spread and taint, and destroy all that is good. It must be cut out—at any pain it must be cut away; if any part be unsound, the corruption will spread."

"Corruption in Cecilia!" exclaimed Helen. "Oh! I know her—I know her from dear childhood! there is nothing corrupt in her, no, not a thought!"

"My dear Helen, you see her as she has been — as she is. I see her as she may become — very — frightfully different. Helen! if truth fail, if the principle of truth fail in her character, all will fail! All that charming nature, all that fair semblance, all that fair reality, all this bright summer's dream of happiness, even love — the supreme felicity of her warm heart — even love will fail her. Cecilia will lose her husband's affections!"

Helen uttered a faint cry.

"Worse!" continued Lady Davenant. "Worse! she will lose her own esteem, she will sink, but I shall be gone," cried she, and, pressing her hand upon her heart, she faintly repeated, "Gone!" And then abruptly added, "Call Cecilia! I must see Cecilia. I must speak to her. But first I will tell you, from a few words that dropped this morning from General Clarendon, I suspect — I fear that Cecilia has deceived him!"

"Impossible! — about what — about whom?"

"That Colonel D'Aubigny," said Lady Davenant.

"I know all about it, and it was all nothing

but nonsense. Did you look at her when the General read that paragraph this morning—did you see that innocent countenance?"

"I saw it, Helen, and thought as you did, but I have been so deceived—so lately in countenance!"

"Not by her's—never."

"Not by your's, Helen, never. And yet, why should I say so? This very morning, your's, had I not known you, your's would have misled me."

"Oh, my foolish absurd habit of blushing, how I wish I could prevent it!" said Helen; "I know it will make me betray somebody some time or other."

"Betray! What have you to betray?" cried Lady Davenant, leaning forward with an eagerness of eye and voice that startled Helen from all power of immediate reply. After an instant's pause she answered firmly, "Nothing, Lady Davenant, and that there is nothing wrong to be known about Cecilia, I as firmly believe as that I stand here at this moment. Can you suspect any thing really wrong?"

"Suspect!—wrong!" cried Lady Davenant,

starting up, with a look in her eyes which made Helen recoil.

"Helen, what can you conceive that I suspect wrong?—Cecilia?—Captain D'Aubigny?—What did you mean? Wrong did you say?—of Cecilia? Could you mean—could you conceive, Helen, that I, having such a suspicion could be here—living with her—or—living anywhere——" And she sank down on the sofa again, seized with sudden spasm—in a convulsion of agonizing pain. But she held Helen's hand fast grasped, detaining her—preventing her from pulling the bell; and by degrees the pain passed off, the livid hue cleared away, the colour of life once more returned, but more tardily than before, and Helen was excessively alarmed.

"Poor child! my poor, dear child, I feel—I hear your heart beating. You are a coward, Helen, but a sweet creature; and I love you—and I love my daughter. What were we saying?"

"Oh, say no more! say no more now, for Heaven's sake," said Helen, kneeling beside her; and, yielding to that imploring look,

Lady Davenant, with a fond smile, parted the hair on her forehead, kissed her, and remained perfectly quiet and silent for some time.

"I am quite well again now," said she, "and quite composed.

"If Cecilia has told her husband the whole truth, she will continue to be, as she is, a happy wife; but if she have deceived him in the estimation of a single word — she is undone. With him, of all men, never will confidence, once broken, unite again. Now General Clarendon told me this morning — would I had known it before the marriage! — that he had made one point with my daughter, and only one, on the faith of which he married: the point was, that she should tell him, if she had ever loved any other man. And she told him — I fear from some words which he said afterwards — I am sure, he is in the belief — the certainty, that his wife never loved any man breathing but himself."

"Nor did she," said Helen. "I can answer for it — she has told him the truth — and she has nothing to fear, nor have you."

"You give me new life!" cried Lady Dave-

nant, her face becoming suddenly radiant with hope; "but how can you answer for this, Helen? You had no part in any deceit, I am sure, but there was something about a miniature of you, which I found in Colonel D'Aubigny's hands one day. That was done, I thought at the time, to deceive me, to make me believe that you were his object. — Deceit there was."

"On his part," said Helen, "much and always; but on Cecilia's there was only, from her over-awe of you, some little concealment; but the whole was broken off and repented of, whatever little there was, long since. And as to loving him, she never did; she told me so then, and often and often she has told me so since."

"Convince me of that," said Lady Davenant; "convince me that she thought what she said. I believe, indeed, that till she met General Clarendon she never felt any enthusiastic attachment, but I thought she liked that man — it was all coquetry, flirting nonsense perhaps. Be it so — I am willing to believe it. Convince me but that she is true—there is the

only point of consequence. The man is dead and gone, the whole in oblivion, and all that is of importance is her truth: convince me but of that, and I am a happy mother."

Helen brought recollections, and proofs from conversations at the time and letters since, confirming at least Cecilia's own belief that she had never loved the man, that it was all vanity on her part and deception on his: Lady Davenant listened, willing to be convinced.

"And now," said she, "let us put this matter out of our minds entirely — I want to talk to you of yourself."

She took Helen out with her in her pony-phaeton, and spoke of Granville Beauclerc, and of his and Helen's prospects of happiness.

Lady Cecilia, who was riding with her husband in some fields adjoining the park, caught a glimpse of the phaeton as it went along the avenue, and, while the General was giving some orders to the wood-ranger about a new plantation, she, telling him that she would be back in two minutes, cantered off to overtake her mother, and, making a short cut across the fields, she leaped a wide ha-ha which came in

her way. But she was an excellent horse-woman, and Fairy carried her lightly over; and when she heard the General's voice in dismay and indignation at what she had done, she turned and laughed, and cantered on till she overtook the phaeton.

The breeze had blown her hair most becomingly, and raised her colour, and her eyes were joyously bright, and her light figure, always well on horseback, now looked so graceful as she bent to speak to her mother, that her husband could not find it in his heart to scold her, and he who came to chide remained to admire. Her mother, looking up at her, could not help exclaiming,

"Well! certainly, you are an excessively pretty creature!"

"Bearers of good news always look well, I believe," said she, smiling; "so there is now some goodness in my face."

"That there certainly is," said her mother, fondly

"But you certainly don't know what it is—you cannot know till I tell you, my dearest Helen—my dear mother, I mean. Granville

Beauclerc will be here to-day — I am sure of it. So pray do not go far from home — do not go out of the grounds: this was what I was in such a hurry to say to you."

"But how do you know, Cecilia?"

"Just because I can read," replied she; "because I can read a newspaper through, which none of you newspaper-readers by profession could do this morning. After you all of you laid them down I took them up, and found in that evening paper which your stupid aide-de-camp had been poring and boring over, a fresh list of arrivals, and Mr. Granville Beauclerc among them at full length. Now he would not stay a moment longer in town than was absolutely necessary, you know, or else he ought to be excommunicated. But it is not in his nature to delay; he will be here directly — I should not be surprised——"

"You are right, Cecilia," interrupted the General, "I see a caleche on that road. — It is he."

The caleche turned into the park, and in a few minutes they met. — Carriages, horses, and servants, were sent off to the house,

while the whole party walked, and talked, and looked.

Lady Cecilia was in delightful spirits, and so affectionately, so delicately joyful — so kind, that if Helen and Beauclerc had ever blamed, or had reason to blame her, it must now be for ever forgotten.

As, in their walk, they came near that seat by the water's side where the lovers had parted, Cecilia whispered something to her mother, and instantly it was "done as desired." Beauclerc and Helen were left to their own explanations, and the rest of the party pursued their walk home.

Of what passed in this explanatory scene no note has been transmitted to the biographer, and we must be satisfied with the result.

CHAPTER XIV

"ALL is right!" cried Lady Cecilia. "O my dear mother, I am the happiest creature in the world, if you were not going away; could not you stay — a little, a very little longer — just till——"

"No, no, my dear, do not urge me to stay," said Lady Davenant; "I cannot—your father expects me to-morrow."

All her preparations were made — in short, it must be so, and Lady Davenant begged her daughter would not spend the short remaining time they were to have together in entreaties, distressing and irritating to the feelings of those who ask and of those who must refuse.

"Let us enjoy in peace," said she, "all that is to be enjoyed this day before I go."

When Helen entered the drawing-room be-

fore dinner, knowing that she was very late, she found assembled Lady Davenant, Beauclerc, and the officers, but Cecilia was not there, nor did the punctual General make his appearance; the dinner-hour was passed, a servant had twice looked in to announce it, and, seeing neither my Lady nor the General, had in surprise retired.

Silence prevailed—what could be the matter? So unusual for the General to be late.

The General came in, hurried — very uncommon in him, and, after saying a few words in a low voice to Lady Davenant who immediately went up stairs, he begged pardon, was very sorry he had kept dinner waiting, but Lady Cecilia had been taken ill — had fainted — she was better — he hoped it was nothing that would signify — she was lying down — he begged they would go to dinner."

And to dinner they went, and when Lady Davenant returned she put Helen's mind at ease by saying it was only a little faintishness from over-fatigue. She had prescribed rest, and Cecilia had herself desired to be left quite alone.

After dinner Lady Davenant went up again to see her, found her not so well — feverish; she would not let Helen go to her—they would talk if they were together, and she thought it necessary to keep Cecilia very quiet. If she would but submit to this, she would be well again probably in the morning."

The General made some reflections low and deep upon Cecilia's imprudence—her little care of herself; he must insist upon her being more cautious. This seemed to Helen to relate to the leap she had taken.

At tea-time, and in the course of the evening twice, Cecilia sent to beg to speak to Helen; but Lady Davenant and the General joined in requesting her not to go. The General went himself to Lady Cecilia to enforce obedience, and he reported that she had submitted with a good grace.

Helen was happily engaged by Beauclerc's conversation during the rest of the evening. It was late before they retired, and when she went up-stairs, Felicie said that her lady was asleep, and had been asleep for the last two hours, and she was sure that after such good

rest her Ladyship would be perfectly well in the morning.

Without further anxiety about her friend, therefore, Helen went to her own room. It was a fine moonlight night, and she threw open the shutters, and stood for a long time looking out upon the moonlight, which she loved; and even after she had retired to bed it was long before she could sleep. The only painful thought in her mind was of Lady Davenant's approaching departure; without her, all happiness would be incomplete; but still, hope and love had much that was delightful to whisper, and, as she at last sank to sleep, Beauclerc's voice seemed still speaking to her in soft sounds.

Yet the dream which followed was uneasy; she thought that they were standing together in the library, at the open door of the conservatory, by moonlight, and he asked her to walk out, and when she did not comply, all changed, and she saw him walking with another—with Lady Castlefort; but then the figure changed to one younger—more beautiful—it must be, as the beating of Helen's heart in the dream told her—it must be Lady Blanche.

Without seeing Helen, however, they seemed to come on, smiling and talking low to each other along the matted alley of the conservatory, almost to the very door where she was still, as she thought, standing with her hand upon the lock, and then they stopped, and Beauclerc pulled from an orange-tree a blossom which seemed the very same which Helen had given to him that evening, he offered it to Lady Blanche, and something he whispered; but at this instant the handle of the lock seemed to slip, and Helen awoke with a start; and when she was awake, the noise of her dream seemed to continue; she heard the real sound of a lock turning,—her door slowly opened, and a white figure appeared. Helen started up in her bed, and awaking thoroughly, saw that it was only Cecilia in her dressing-gown.

"Cecilia! What 's the matter, my dear? are you worse?"

Lady Cecilia put her finger on her lips, closed the door behind her, and said, "Hush! hush! or you 'll waken Felicie; she is sleeping in the dressing-room to-night. Mamma ordered it, in case I should want her."

"And how are you now? What can I do for you?"

"My dear Helen, you can do something for me, indeed. But don't get up. Lie down and listen to me. I want to speak to you."

"Sit down, then, my dear Cecilia, sit down here beside me."

"No no, I need not sit down, I am very well, standing. Only let me say what I have to say. I am quite well."

"Quite well! indeed you are not. I feel you all trembling. You must sit down, indeed, my dear," said Helen, pressing her.

She sat down. "Now listen to me, — do not waste time, for I can't stay. Oh! if the General should awake and find me gone!"

"What is the matter, my dear Cecilia? Only tell me what I can do for you."

"That is the thing; but I am afraid, now it is come to the point." Lady Cecilia breathed quick and short. "I am almost afraid to ask you to do this for me."

"Afraid! my dear Cecilia, to ask me to do anything in this world for you! How can you be afraid? Tell me only what it is at once."

"I am very foolish — I am very weak. I know you love me — would do anything for me, Helen. And this is the simplest thing in the world, but the greatest favour — the greatest service. It is only just to receive a packet, which the General will give you in the morning. He will ask if it is for you. And you will just accept of it. I don't ask you to say it is yours, or to say a word about it — only receive it for me."

"Yes, I will, to be sure. But why should he give it to me, and not to yourself?"

"Oh, he thinks, and you must let him think, it is for you, that's all. Will you promise me?"—But Helen made no answer. "Oh, promise me, promise me, speak, for I can't stay. I will explain it all to you in the morning." She rose to go.

"Stay, stay! Cecilia," cried Helen, stopping her; "stay!—you must, indeed, explain it all to me now— you must indeed!"

Lady Cecilia hesitated — said she had not time. "You said, Helen, that you would take the packet, and you know you must; but I will explain it all as fast as I can. You know

I fainted, but you do not know why? I will tell you exactly how it all happened: — you recollect my coming into the library after I was dressed, before you went up-stairs, and giving you a sprig of orange flowers?"

"Oh yes, I was dreaming of it just now when you came in," said Helen. "Well, what of that?"

"Nothing, only you must have been surprised to hear so soon afterwards that I had fainted."

"Yes," Helen said, she had been very much surprised and alarmed; and again Lady Cecilia paused.

"Well, I went from you directly to Clarendon, to give him a rose, which you may remember I had in my hand for him. I found him in the study, talking to Corporal somebody. He just smiled as I came in, took the rose, and said, 'I shall be ready this moment:' and looking to a table on which were heaps of letters and parcels which Granville had brought from town, he added, 'I do not know whether there is anything there for you, Cecilia?' I went to look, and he went on talking to his cor-

poral. He was standing with his back to the table."

Helen felt that Lady Cecilia told all these minute details as if there was some fact to which she feared to come. Cecilia went on very quickly. "I did not find anything for myself; but in tossing over the papers I saw a packet directed to General Clarendon. I thought it was a feigned hand—and yet that I knew it — that I had seen it somewhere lately. There was one little flourish that I recollected; it was like the writing of that wretched Carlos."

"Carlos!" cried Helen: "well!"

"The more I looked at it," continued Lady Cecilia, "the more like I thought it; and I was going to say so to the General, only I waited till he had done his business: but as I was examining it, through the outer cover, of very thin foreign paper, I could distinguish the writing of some of the inside, and it was like your hand, or like mine. You know, between our hands there is such a great resemblance, there is no telling one from the other."

Helen did not think so, but she remained silent.

"At least," said Cecilia, answering her look of doubt, "at least the General says so; he never knows our hands asunder. Well! I perceived that there was something hard inside —more than papers; and as I felt it, there came from it an uncommon perfume—a particular perfume, like what I used to have once, at the time—that time that I can never bear to think of, you know——"

"I know," said Helen, and in a low voice she added, "you mean about Colonel D'Aubigny."

"The perfume, and altogether I do not know what, quite overcame me. I had just sense enough to throw the packet from me: I made an effort, and reached the window, and I was trying to open the sash, I remember; but what happened immediately after that, I cannot tell you. When I came to myself, I was in my husband's arms; he was carrying me upstairs—and so much alarmed about me he was! Oh, Helen, I do so love him! He laid me on the bed, and he spoke so kindly, reproaching me for not taking more care of myself—but so fondly! Somehow I could not

bear it just then, and I closed my eyes as his met mine. He, I knew, could suspect nothing — but still! He stayed beside me, holding my hand: then dinner was ready; he had been twice summoned. It was a relief to me when he left me. Next, I believe, my mother came up, and felt my pulse, and scolded me for over-fatiguing myself, and for that leap; and I pleaded guilty, and it was all very well. I saw she had not an idea there was anything else. Mamma really is not suspicious, with all her penetration — she is not suspicious."

"And why did not you tell her all the little you had to tell, dear Cecilia? If you had, long ago, when I begged of you to do so — if you had told your mother all about——"

"Told her!" interrupted Cecilia; "told my mother! — oh no, Helen!"

Helen sighed, and feebly said, "Go on."

"Well! when you were at dinner, it came into my poor head that the General would open that parcel before I could see you again, and before I could ask your advice and settle with you — before I could know what was to be done. I was so anxious, I sent for you twice."

"But Lady Davenant and the General forbade me to go to you."

"Yes," — Lady Cecilia said she understood that, and she had seen the danger of shewing too much impatience to speak to Helen; she thought it might excite suspicion of her having something *particular* to say, she had therefore refrained from asking again. She was not asleep when Helen came to bed, though Felicie thought she was; she was much too anxious to sleep till she had seen her husband again; she was awake when he came into his room; she saw him come in with some letters and packets in his hand; by his look she knew all was still safe — he had not opened *that* particular packet — he held it among a parcel of military returns in his hand as he came to the side of the bed on tiptoe to see if she was asleep — to ask how she did; "He touched my pulse," said Lady Cecilia, — "and I am sure he might well say it was terribly quick.

"Every instant I thought he would open that packet. He threw it, however, and all the rest, down on the table, to be read in the morning,

as usual, as soon as he awoke. After feeling my pulse again, the last thing, and satisfying himself that it was better — 'Quieter now,' said he, he fell fast asleep, and slept so soundly, and I——"

Helen looked at her with astonishment, and was silent.

"Oh speak to me!" said Lady Cecilia, "what do you say, Helen?"

"I say that I cannot imagine why you are so much alarmed about this packet."

"Because I am a fool, I believe," said Lady Cecilia, trying to laugh. "I am so afraid of his opening it."

"But why?" said Helen, "what do you think there is in it?"

"I have told you, surely! Letters—foolish letters of mine to that D'Aubigny. Oh how I repent I ever wrote a line to him! And he told me, he absolutely swore, he had destroyed every note and letter I ever wrote to him. He was the most false of human beings!"

"He was a very bad man—I always thought so," said Helen; "but, Cecilia, I never knew that he had any letters of yours."

"Oh yes, you did, my dear, at the time; do not you recollect I shewed you a letter, and it was you who made me break off the correspondence?"

"I remember your shewing me several letters of his," said Helen, "but not of yours — only one or two notes — asking for that picture back again which he had stolen from your portfolio."

"Yes, and about the verses; surely you recollect my shewing you another letter of mine, Helen!"

"Yes, but these were all of no consequence; there must be more, or you could not be so much afraid, Cecilia, of the General's seeing these, surely."

At this moment Lady Davenant's prophecy, all she had said about her daughter, flashed across Helen's mind, and with increasing eagerness she went on.

"What is there in those letters that can alarm you so much?"

"I declare I do not know," said Cecilia, "that is the plain truth; I cannot recollect — I cannot be certain what there is in them."

"But it is not so long ago, Cecilia, — only two years?"

"That is true, but so many great events have happened since, and such new feelings, all that early nonsense was swept out of my mind. I never really loved that wretch——"

A gleam of joy came across Helen's face.

"Never, never," repeated Lady Cecilia.

"Oh I am happy still," cried Helen. "I told your mother I was sure of this."

"Good heavens! — Does she know about this packet?"

"No, no! — how could she? But what frightens you, my dear Cecilia? you say there is nothing wrong in the letters?"

"Nothing — nothing."

"Then make no wrong out of nothing," cried Helen. "If you break confidence with your husband, that confidence will never, never unite again — your mother says so."

"My mother!" cried Cecilia: "Good heavens! — so she does suspect?— tell me, Helen, tell me what she suspects."

"That you did not at first — before you

were married, tell the General the whole truth about Colonel D'Aubigny."

Cecilia was silent.

"But it is not yet too late," said Helen, earnestly; "you can set it all right now — this is the moment, my dearest Cecilia. Do, do," cried Helen, "do tell him all — bid him look at the letters."

"Look at them! Impossible! Impossible!" said Lady Cecilia. "Bid me die rather."

She turned quite away.

"Listen to me, Cecilia;" she held her fast. "You must do it, Cecilia."

"Helen, I cannot."

"You can, indeed you can," said Helen; "only have courage *now*, and you will be happier all your life afterwards."

"Do not ask it — do not ask it — it is all in vain, you are wasting time."

"No, no — not wasting time; and in short, Cecilia, you must do what I ask of you, for it is right; and I will not do what you ask of me, for it is wrong."

"You will not! — You will not!" cried Lady Cecilia, breathless. "After all! You

will not receive the packet for me! you will not let the General believe the letters to be yours! Then I am undone! You will not do it! — Then do not talk to me — do not talk to me — you do not know General Clarendon. If his jealousy were once roused, you have no idea what it would be."

"If the man were alive," said Helen, "but since he is dead——"

"But Clarendon would never forgive me for having loved another——"

"You said you did not love him."

"Nor did I ever *really* love that man; but still Clarendon, from even seeing those letters, might think I did. The very fact of having written such letters would be destruction to me with Clarendon. You do not know Clarendon. How can I convince you it is impossible for me to tell him? At the time he first proposed for me——oh! how I loved him, and feared to lose him. One day my mother, when I was not by, said something — I do not know what, about a first love, let fall something about that hateful D'Aubigny, and the General came to me in such a state! Oh, Helen, in such a state!

I thought it was all at an end. He told me he never would marry any woman on earth who had ever loved another.

"I told him I never had, and that was true, you know; but then I went a little beyond perhaps. I said I had never THOUGHT of any body else, for he made such a point of that. In short, I was a coward—a fool; I little foresaw — I laughed it off, and told him that what mamma had said was all a mistake, all nonsense; that Colonel D'Aubigny was a sort of universal flirt — and that was very true, I am sure; that he had admired us both, both you and me, but you last, you most, Helen, I said."

"Oh, Cecilia, how could you say so, when you knew he never cared for me in the least?"

"Forgive me, my dear, for there was no other way; and what harm did it do you, or what harm can it ever do you? It only makes it the easier for you to help me — to save me now. And Granville," continued Lady Cecilia, thinking that was the obstacle in Helen's mind, "and Granville need never know it."

Helen's countenance suddenly changed—— "Granville! I never thought of that!" and

now she did think of it, she reproached herself with the selfishness of that fear. Till this moment, she knew her motives had been all singly for Cecilia's happiness; now the fear she felt of this some way hurting her with Beauclerc made her less resolute. Lady Cecilia saw her giving way and hurried on——

"Oh, my dear Helen! I know I have been very wrong, but you would not quite give me up, would you?— Oh! for my mother's sake! Consider how it would be with my mother, so ill as you saw her——"

All the motives together pressed in confusion on Helen's mind; Cecilia saw her yielding, and hurried on——

"I am sure if anything broke out now in my mother's state of health it would be fatal."

Helen became excessively agitated.

"Oh, Helen! would you make me the death of that mother? — Oh, Helen, save her! and do what you will with me afterwards. It will be only for a few hours — only a few hours!" repeated Lady Cecilia, seeing that these words made a great impression upon Helen, — "Save me, Helen! save my mother."

She sank upon her knees, clasping her hands in an agony of supplication. Helen bent down her head and was silent — she could no longer refuse. "Then I must," said she.

"Oh thank you! bless you!" cried Lady Cecilia, in an ecstasy — "you will take the letters?"

"Yes," Helen feebly said; "yes, since it must be so."

Cecilia embraced her, thanked her, blessed her, and hastily left the room, but in an instant afterward she returned and said,

"One thing I forgot, and I must tell you. Think of my forgetting it! The letters are not signed with my real name, they are signed Emma.—Henry and Emma!—Oh folly, folly! My dear, dear friend! save me but now, and I never will be guilty of the least deception again during my whole life; believe me, believe me! When once my mother is safely gone I will tell Clarendon all. Look at me, dear Helen, look at me and believe me."

And Helen looked at her, and Helen believed her.

CHAPTER XV

HELEN slept no more this night. When alone, in the stillness of the long hours, she went over and over again all that had passed, what Cecilia had said, what she had at first thought and afterwards felt, all the persuasions by which she had been wrought upon, and on the contrary, all the reasons by which she ought to be decided; backward and forward her mind vibrated, and its painful vacillation could not be stilled.

"What am I going to do? To tell a falsehood! That cannot be right; but in the circumstances — yet this is Cecilia's own way of palliating the fault that her mother so fears in her — that her mother trusted to me to guard her against; and now, already, even before Lady Davenant has left us, I am going to assist Cecilia in deceiving her husband, and

on that very dangerous point — Colonel D'Aubigny "

Lady Davenant's foreboding having already been so far accomplished struck Helen fearfully, and her warning voice in the dead silence of that night sounded, and her look was upon her, so strongly, that she for an instant hid her head to get rid of her image.

" But what *can* I do! her own life is at stake! No less a motive could move me, but this ought — must — shall decide me. Yet, if Lady Davenant were to know it! — and I, in the last hours I have to pass with her — the last I ever may have with her, shall I deceive her? But it is not deceit, only prudence — necessary prudence; what a physician would order, what even humanity requires. I am satisfied it is quite right, quite, and I will go to sleep that I may be strong, and calm, and do it all well in the morning. After all, I have been too cowardly; frightening myself about nothing; too scrupulous — for what is it I have promised? only to receive the letters as if they were mine. Not to *say* that they are mine; he

will not ask me, Cecilia thinks he will not ask me. But how can she tell? if he should, what *can* I do? I must then answer that they are mine. Indeed it is the same thing, for I should lead him to believe it as much by my receiving them in silence; it will be telling or acting an absolute falsehood, and can that ever be right?"

Back it came to the same point, and in vain her cheek settled on the pillow and she thought she could sleep. Then with closed eyes she considered how the General would look, and speak, or not speak. "What will he think of me when he sees the picture — the letters? for he must open the packet. But he will not read them, no, he is too honourable. I do not know what is in them. There can be nothing, however, but nonsense, Cecilia says; yet even so, love-letters he must know they are, and a clandestine correspondence. I heard him once express such contempt for any clandestine affair. He, who is so nice, so strict, about women's conduct, how I shall sink in his esteem! Well, be it so, that concerns only my-

self; and it is for his own sake too, to save his happiness; and Cecilia, my dear Cecilia, oh I can bear it, and it will be a pride to me to bear it, for I am grateful; my gratitude shall not be only in words; now, when I am put to the trial I can do something for my friends. Yes, and I will, let the consequences be what they may."

Yet Beauclerc! that thought was at the bottom of her heart; the fear, the almost certainty, that some way or other — every way in which she could think of it, it would lead to difficulty with Beauclerc. But this fear was mere selfishness, she thought, and to counteract it came all her generous, all her grateful, all her long-cherished, romantic love of sacrifice — a belief that she was capable of self-devotion for the friends she loved; and upon the strength of this idea she fixed at last. Quieted, she soothed herself to repose, and, worn out with reasoning or trying to reason in vain, she at last, in spite of the morning light dawning upon her through the unclosed shutters, in a soft sort of enthusiastic vision fading away, fell asleep.

She slept long; when she awoke it was with

that indescribable feeling that something painful had happened — that something dreadful was to be this day. She recollected, first, that Lady Davenant was to go. Then came all that had passed with Cecilia. It was late, she saw that her maid had been in the room, but had refrained from awakening her; she rose, and dressed as fast as she could. She was to go to Lady Davenant, when her bell rang twice. How to appear before one who knew her countenance so well, without shewing that anything had happened, was her first difficulty.

She looked in her glass to see whether there was any alteration in her face; none that she could see, but she was no judge. "How foolish to think so much about it all!" She dressed, and between times inquired from her maid if she had heard of any change in Lady Davenant's intentions of going. Had any counter-orders about the carriage been given? None; the packing of the carriage was going on; ordered to be at the door by twelve o'clock.

"That was well," Helen said to herself. "It would all soon be over. Lady Davenant

would be safe, then she could bear all the rest; next she hoped, that any perturbation or extraordinary emotion in herself would not be observed in the hurry of departure, or would be thought natural at parting with Lady Davenant."

"So then, I come at every turn to some little deceit," thought she, "and I must, I must!" and she sighed.

"It is a sad thing for you, ma'am, Lady Davenant's going away," said her maid.

Helen sighed again. "Very sad indeed."

Suddenly a thought darted into her mind, that the whole danger might be avoided. A hope came that the General might not open the packet before Lady Davenant's departure, in which case Cecilia could not expect that she should abide by her promise, as it was only conditional. It had been made really on her mother's account; Cecilia had said that if once her mother was safe out of the house, she could then, and she would the very next day, tell the whole to her husband. Helen sprang from under the hands of her maid as she was putting up her hair behind, and ran

to Cecilia's dressing-room, but she was not there. It was now her usual time for coming, and Helen left open the door between them, that she might go to her before Felicie should be rung for. She waited impatiently, but no Cecilia came. The time, to her impatience, seemed dreadfully long. But her maid observed, that as her Ladyship had not been well yesterday, it was no wonder she was later this morning than usual.

"Very true, but there is somebody coming along the gallery now, see if that is Lady Cecilia."

"No, ma'am, Mademoiselle Felicie."

Mademoiselle Felicie said ditto to Helen's own maid, and, moreover, supposed her lady might not have slept well. Just then, one little peremptory knock at the door was heard.

"Bon Dieu! C'est Monsieur le Général!" exclaimed Felicie.

It was so—Felicie went to the door and returned with the General's compliments to Miss Stanley, and he begged to see her as soon as it might suit her convenience in the library,

before she went into the breakfast-room, and after she should have seen Lady Cecilia, who wished to see her immediately

Helen found Lady Cecilia in bed, looking as if she had been much agitated, two spots of carnation colour high up in her cheeks, a well-known sign in her of great emotion.

"Helen!" she cried, starting up the moment Helen came in, "he has opened the packet, and you see me alive. But I do believe I should have died, when it came to the point, but for you — dearest Helen, I should have been, and still but for you I must be, undone—and my mother—oh! if he had gone to her!"

"What has happened, tell me clearly, my dear Cecilia, and quickly, for I must go to General Clarendon; he has desired to see me as soon as I can after seeing you."

"I know, I know," said Cecilia, "but he will allow time, and you had better be some time with me, for he thinks I have all to explain to you this morning—and so I have, a great deal to say to you; sit down — quietly — Oh

if you knew how I have been agitated, I am hardly able yet to tell anything rightly."

She threw herself back on the pillows, and drew a long breath, as if to relieve the oppression of mind and body.

"Now I think I can tell it you."

"Then do, my dear Cecilia — all — pray do! and exactly — oh, Cecilia, tell me all."

"Every word, every look, to the utmost, as far as I can recollect, as if you had been present. Give me your hand, Helen, how cool you are — delightful! but how you tremble!"

"Never mind," said Helen; "but how burning hot your hand is!"

"No matter. If ever I am well or happy again in this world, Helen, I shall owe it to you. After I left you I found the General fast asleep, I do not believe he had ever awoke — I lay awake for hours, till past five o'clock in the morning, I was wide awake —feverish. But can you conceive it? just then, when I was most anxious to be awake, when I knew that there was but one hour — not so much, till he would awake and read

that packet, I felt an irresistible sleepiness come over me; I turned and turned, and tried to keep my eyes open, and pulled and pinched my fingers. But all would not do, and I fell asleep, dreaming that I was awake, and how long I slept I cannot tell you, so deep, so dead asleep I must have been; but the instant I did awake, I started up and drew back the curtain, and I saw — oh, Helen! there was Clarendon, dressed — standing with his arms folded — a letter open, hanging from his hand.

"His eyes were fixed upon me, waiting, watching for my first look: he saw me glance at the letter in his hand, and then at the packet on the table near the bed. For an instant neither of us spoke: I could not, nor exclaim even; but surprised, terrified, he must have seen I was. As I leaned forward, holding by the curtains, he pulled one of them suddenly back, threw open the shutters, and the full glare was upon my face. I shut my eyes — I could not help it — and shrank; but, gathering strength from absolute terror of his silence, I spoke: I asked, 'For Heaven's sake! Claren-

don, what is the matter? Why do you look so?'

"Oh, that look of his! still fixed on me — the same as I once saw before we were married — once, and but once, when he came from my mother to me about this man. Well! I put my hands before my eyes; he stepped forward, drew them down, and placed the open letter before me, and then asked me, in a terrible sort of suppressed voice, 'Cecilia, whose writing is this?'

"The writing was before my eyes, but I literally could not see it — it was all a sort of maze. He saw I could not read it, and calmly bade me 'Take time — examine — is it a forgery?'

"A forgery! — that had never crossed my mind, and for an instant I was tempted to say it was; but quickly I saw that would not do: there was the miniature, and that could not be a forgery. 'No,' I answered, 'I do not think it is a forgery.'

"'What then?' said he, so hastily that I could hardly hear; and before I could think what to answer, he said, 'I must see Lady

Davenant.' He stepped towards the bell; I threw myself upon his arm — 'Good Heavens! do not, Clarendon, if you are not out of your senses.' 'I am not out of my senses, Cecilia, I am perfectly calm; answer me, one word only —is this your writing?' Oh! my dear Helen, then it was that you saved me."

"I!"

"Yes, forgive me, Helen, I answered, 'There is a handwriting so like, that you never can tell it from mine. Ask me no more, Clarendon,' I said.

"I saw a flash of light, as it were, come across his face—it was hope—but still it was not certainty. I saw this: oh! how quick one sees. He pointed to the first words of the letter, held his finger under them, and his hand trembled—think of his hand trembling! 'Read,' he said, and I read. How I brought myself to pronounce the words, I cannot imagine. I read what, as I hope for mercy, I had no recollection of ever having written — 'My dear, too dear Henry.' 'Colonel D'Aubigny?' said the General. I answered, 'Yes.' He looked astonished at my self-possession—

and so was I. For another instant his finger rested, pressing down there under the words, and his eyes on my face, as if he would have read into my soul. 'Ask me no more,' I repeated, scarcely able to speak; and something I said, I believe, about honour and not betraying you. He turned to the signature, and, putting his hand down upon it, asked, 'What name is signed to this letter?' I answered, I have seen — I know — I believe it is 'Emma.'

"'You knew then of this correspondence?' was his next question. I confessed I did. He said that was wrong, 'but quite a different affair' from having been engaged in it myself, or some such word. His countenance cleared; that pale look of the forehead, the fixed purpose of the eye, changed. Oh! I could see — I understood it all with half a glance — saw the natural colour coming back, and tenderness for me returning — yet some doubt lingering still. He stood, and I heard some half-finished sentences. He said that you must have been very young at that time; I said, 'Yes, very young:'—'And the man was a most artful man,' he observed; I said, 'Yes, very artful.' That

was true, I am sure. Clarendon then recollected that you shewed some emotion one day when Colonel D'Aubigny was first mentioned—at that time, you know, when we heard of his death. I said nothing. The General went on: 'I could hardly have believed all this of Helen Stanley,' he said. He questioned no farther: — and oh! Helen, what do you think I did next? but it was the only thing left me to put an end to doubts, which, to *me*, must have been fatal — Forgive me, Helen!"

"Tell me what you did," said Helen.

"Cannot you guess?"

"You told him positively that I wrote the letters?"

"No, not so bad, I never said that downright falsehood—no, I could not, but I did almost as bad."

"Pray tell me at once, my dear Cecilia."

"Then, in the first place, I stretched out my hand for the whole packet of letters which lay on the table untouched."

"Well?"

"Well, he put them into my hands and said, 'There was no direction on these but to

myself, I have not looked at any of them except this, which in ignorance I first opened; I have not read one word of any of the others.'"

"Well," said Helen; "and what did you do?"

"I said I was not going to read any of the letters, that I was only looking for—now, Helen, you know—I told you there was something hard in the parcel, something more than papers, I was sure what it must be—the miniature—the miniature of you, which I painted, you know, that I might have it when you were gone, and which *he* stole, and pretended before my mother to be admiring as your likeness, but he kept it only because it was my painting. I opened the paper in which it was folded; Clarendon darted upon it—'It is Helen!' and then he said, 'How like! how beautiful! how unworthy of that man!'

"But, oh, Helen, think of what an escape I had next. There was my name—my initials C.D. at the bottom of the picture, as the painter; and that horrible man, not content with his initials opposite to mine, had on the back written at full length, 'For Henry

D'Aubigny.'—Clarendon looked at it, and said between his teeth, 'He is dead.'—'Thank God!' said I.

"Then he asked me, how I came to paint this picture for that man; I answered—oh how happy then it was for me that I could tell the whole truth about that at least!—I answered that I did not do the picture for Colonel D'Aubigny; that it never was given to him; that he stole it from my portfolio, and that we both did what we could to get it back again from him, but could not. And that you even wanted me to tell my mother, but of that I was afraid; and Clarendon said, 'You were wrong there, my dear Cecilia.'

"I was so touched when I heard him call me his dear Cecilia again, and in his own dear voice, that I burst into tears. That was a great relief to me, and I kept saying over and over again, that I was wrong—very wrong indeed! and then he kneeled down beside me, and I so felt his tenderness, his confiding love for me—for me, unworthy as I am."

The tears streamed from Lady Cecilia's eyes as she spoke—"Quite unworthy!"

"No, no, not quite unworthy," said Helen; "my poor dear Cecilia, what you must have felt!"

"Once!" continued Cecilia—"once! Helen, as my head was lying on his shoulder, my face hid, I felt so much love, so much remorse, and knowing I had done nothing really bad, I was tempted to whisper all in his ear. I felt I should be so much happier for ever — ever — if I could!"

"Oh that you had! my dear Cecilia, I would give anything upon earth for *your* sake, that you had."

"Helen, I could not — I could not. It was too late, I should have been undone if I had breathed but a word. When he even suspected the truth! that look — that voice was so terrible. To see it — hear it again! I could not — oh, Helen, it would have been utter ruin — madness. I grant you, my dear Helen, it might have been done at first, before I was married; oh would to heaven it had! but it is useless thinking of that now. Helen, my whole earthly happiness is in your hands,

this is all I have to say, may I — may I depend on you ?"

" Yes, yes, depend upon me, my dearest Cecilia," said Helen ; " now let me go."

Lady Cecilia held her one instant longer, to say that she had asked Clarendon to leave it to her to return the letters, " to save you the embarrassment, my dearest Helen ; but he answered he must do this himself, and I did not dare to press the matter ; but you need not be alarmed, he will be all gentleness to you, he said ' it is so different.' Do not be afraid."

" Afraid for myself ?" said Helen ; " oh no —Rest, dear Cecilia, and let me go."

" Go then, go," cried Cecilia ; " but for you, what would become of my mother !—of me !—you save us all."

Believing this, Helen hastened to accomplish her purpose ; resolved to go through with it, whatever it might cost, her scruples vanished, and she felt a sort of triumphant pleasure in the courage of sacrificing herself.

CHAPTER XVI.

GENERAL CLARENDON was sitting in the music-room, within the library, the door open, so that he could see Helen the moment she came in; and that moment he threw down his book as he rose, and their eyes met: her's fell beneath his penetrating glance; he came forward immediately to meet her, with the utmost gentleness and kindness in his whole appearance and manner, took her hand, and, drawing her arm within his, said in the most encouraging voice,

"Consider me as your brother, Helen; you know you have allowed me so to feel for you, and so, believe me, I do feel."

This kindness quite overcame her, and she burst into tears. He hurried her across the library, into the inner room, seated her, and when he had closed the door, stood beside her, and began, as if he had been to blame, to apologise for himself.

"You must have been surprised at my having opened letters which did not belong to me, but there was no direction, no indication that could stop me. They were simply in a cover directed to me. The purpose of whoever sent them must have been to make me read them; the ultimate purpose was, I doubt not, to ruin Lady Cecilia Clarendon in my opinion."

"Or me," said Helen.

"No, Miss Stanley, no, that at all events cannot be," said the General. "Supposing the letters to be acknowledged by you, still it would be quite a different affair. But in the first place look at them, they may be forgeries. You will tell me if they are forgeries?"

And he placed the packet in her hands. Scarcely looking at the writing, she answered,

"No, forgeries I am sure they are not."

The General looked again at the direction of the cover, and observed,

"This is a feigned hand. Whose can it be?"

Helen was on the brink of saying that Cecilia had told her it was like the writing of Carlos. Now this cover had not, to the General's knowledge, been seen by Cecilia, and that one answer might have betrayed all that she was to conceal, for he would instantly have asked how and

when did Cecilia see it, and the cause of her fainting would have been then understood by him. Such hazards in every, even the first, least, step in falsehood; such hazard in this first moment! But she escaped this peril, and Helen answered:

"It is something like the writing of the page Carlos, but I do not think all that direction is his. There seem to be two different hands. I do not know, indeed, how it is."

"Some time or other it will come out," said the General. "I will keep this cover, it will lead to the detection of that boy, or of whoever it was that employed him."

To give her further time the General went on looking at the miniature, which he held in his hand. "This is a beautiful likeness," said he, "and not ill painted—by Cecilia, was not it?"

Helen looked at it, and answered, "Yes, by Cecilia."

"I am glad it is safe," said the General, "restored—Cecilia told me the history. I know that it was stolen, not given by you."

"Given!" said Helen. "Oh no! stolen."

"Base!" said the General.

"He was base," answered Helen.

General Clarendon held in his hand, along

with the picture, one letter separated from the rest, open; he looked at it as if embarrassed, while Helen spoke the last words, and he repeated, "Base! yes, he certainly was, or he would have destroyed these letters."

Again Helen was on the point of saying that Colonel D'Aubigny had told Cecilia he had done so, but fortunately her agitation, in default of presence of mind, kept her silent.

"This is the first letter I opened," said the General, "before I was aware that they were not what I should read. I saw only the first words, I thought then that I had a right to read them. When these letters met my eyes, I conceived them to have been written by my wife. I had a right to satisfy myself respecting the nature of the correspondence; that done, I looked no farther. I bore my suspense — I waited till she awoke."

"So she told me, Cecilia has told me all; but even if she had not, in any circumstances who could doubt your honour, General Clarendon?"

"Then trust to it, Miss Stanley, for the past, for the future, trust to it! You gratify me more than I can express—you do me justice. I wished to return these letters to you with my own hand," continued he, "to satisfy myself,

in the first place, that there was no mistake. Of that, your present candour, indeed the first look of that ingenuous countenance, was sufficient."

Helen felt that she blushed all over.

"Pardon me for distressing you, my dear Helen. It was a matter in which a man MUST be selfish, *must* in point of honour, *must* in point of feeling. I owe to your candour not merely relief from what I could not endure and live, but relief from suspicion,—suspicion of the truth of one dearer to me than life."

Helen sat as if she had been transfixed.

"I owe to you," continued he, "the happiness of my whole future life."

"Then I am happy," cried Helen, "happy in this, at all events, whatever may become of me."

She had not yet raised her eyes towards the General; she felt as if her first look must betray Cecilia; but she now tried to fix her eyes upon him as he looked anxiously at her, and she said, "Thank you, thank you, General Clarendon! Oh, thank you for all the kindness you have shewn me; but I am the more grieved, it makes me more sorry to sink quite in your esteem."

"To sink! You do not: your candour, your truth raises you——"

"Oh! do not say that——"

"I do," repeated the General, "and you may believe me. I am incapable of deceiving you — this is no matter of compliment. Between friend and friend I should count a word, a look of falsehood, treason."

Helen's tears stopped, and, without knowing what she did, she began hastily to gather up the packet of letters which she had let fall; the General assisted her in putting them into her bag, and she closed the strings, thanked him, and was rising, when he went on—"I beg your indulgence while I say a few words of myself."

She sat down again immediately. "Oh! as many as you please."

"I believe I may say I am not of a jealous temper."

"I am sure you are not," said Helen.

"I thank you," said the General. "May I ask on what your opinion is founded?"

"On what has now passed, and on all that I have heard from Lady Davenant."

He bowed. "You may have heard, then, from Lady Davenant of some unfortunate circumstances in my own and in a friend's family which happened a short time before my marriage?"

Helen said she had.

" And of the impression these circumstances made on my mind, my consequent resolve never to marry a woman who had ever had any previous attachment ?"

Helen was breathless at hearing all this repeated.

" Were you informed of these particulars ?" said the General.

" Yes," said Helen faintly.

" I am not asking, Miss Stanley, whether you approved of my resolution ; simply whether you heard of it ?"

" Yes — certainly."

" That 's well. It was on an understanding between Cecilia and myself on this point, that I married. Did you know this ?"

" Yes," said Helen.

" Some words," continued the General, " once fell from Lady Davenant concerning this Colonel D'Aubigny which alarmed me. Cecilia satisfied me that her mother was mistaken. Cecilia solemnly assured me that she had never loved him." The General paused.

Helen, conceiving that he waited for and required her opinion, replied, " So I always thought — so I often told Lady Davenant."

But at this moment recollecting the words at the beginning of that letter, "My dear, too dear Henry," Helen's voice faltered.

The General saw her confusion, but attributed it to her own consciousness. "Had Lady Davenant not been mistaken," resumed he, "that is to say, had there ever been — as might have happened not unnaturally — had there ever been an attachment; in short, had Cecilia ever loved him and told me so, I am convinced that such truth and candour would have satisfied me, would have increased — as I now feel — increased my esteem. I am at this moment convinced that, in spite of my declared resolution, I should, in perfect confidence, have married."

"O that Cecilia had but told him!" thought Helen.

"I should not, my dear Miss Stanley," continued the General, "have thus taken up your time talking of myself, had I not an important purpose in view. I was desirous to do away in your mind the idea of my great strictness — not on my own account, but on yours I wished to dispel this notion. Now you will no longer, I trust, apprehend that my esteem for you is diminished. I assure you I can make allowances."

She was shocked at the idea of allowances, yet thanked him for his indulgence, and she could hardly refrain from again bursting into tears.

"Still by your agitation I see you are afraid of me," said he smiling.

"No indeed; not afraid of you, but shocked at what you must think of me."

"I am not surprised, but sorry to see that the alarm I gave my poor Cecilia this morning has passed from her mind into yours. To her I must have appeared harsh: I *was* severe; but when I thought I had been deceived, duped, can you wonder?"

Helen turned her eyes away.

"My dear Miss Stanley, why will not you distinguish? the cases are essentially different. Nine out of ten of the young ladies who marry in these countries do not marry the first object of their fancy, and wherever there is, as there will be, I am sure, in your case, perfect candour, I do not apprehend the slightest danger to the happiness of either party. On the contrary, I should foretel an increase of esteem and love. Beauclerc has often——"

Beauclerc's voice was at this instant heard in the hall.

"Compose yourself, my dear Miss Stanley — this way," said the General, opening a door into the conservatory, for he heard Beauclerc's step now in the library. The General followed Helen as she left the room, and touching the bag that contained the letters, said,

"Remember, whatever may be your hurry, lock this up first."

"Thank you," answered she; "I will, I will!" and she hastened on, and in a moment she was safe across the hall and upstairs, without meeting any one, and in her own room, and the bag locked up in her cabinet. Lady Davenant's bell rang as she went to her apartment; she looked in at Cecilia, who started up in her bed.

"All is over," said Helen, "all is well. I have the letters locked up; I cannot stay."

Helen disengaged herself almost forcibly from Cecilia's embrace, and she was in Lady Davenant's room in another minute. She bade her good morning as composedly as she could, she thought quite as usual. But that was impossible: so much the better, for it would not have been natural this last morning of Lady Davenant's stay, when nothing was as usual externally or internally. All was preparation for de-

parture — her maids packing — Lady Davenant making some last arrangements — in the midst of which she stopped to notice Helen — pressed her in her arms, and, after looking once in her face, said, " My poor child ! it must be so."

Elliott interrupted, asking some question, purposely to draw off her attention ; and while she turned about to give some orders to another servant, Elliott said to Miss Stanley,

" My Lady was not well last night ; she must be kept from all that can agitate her, as much as possible."

Helen at that instant rejoiced that she had done what she had. She agreed with Elliott, she said, that all emotion which could be avoided should ; and upon this principle busied herself, and was glad to employ herself in whatever she could to assist the preparations, avoiding all conversation with Lady Davenant.

" You are right, my love — quite right," said Lady Davenant. " The best way is to employ one'sself always to the last. Yes, put up those drawings carefully, in this portfolio, Elliott ; take silver paper, Helen."

They were Helen's own drawings, so all went on, and all was safe — even when Cecilia was spoken of; while the silver paper

went over the drawings, Helen answered that she had seen her. "She was not well, but still, not seriously ill, though——"

"Yes," said Lady Davenant; "only the General is too anxious about her — very naturally. He sent me word just now," continued she, "that he has forbidden her to get up before breakfast. I will go and see her now; dear Cecilia! I hope she will do well— every way — I feel sure of it, Helen — sure as you do yourself, my dear—But what is the matter?"

"Nothing!" said Helen. That was not quite true; but she could not help it—"Nothing!" repeated she. "Only I am anxious, my dear Lady Davenant," continued poor Helen blundering, unaccustomed to evasions — "only I am very anxious you should go soon to Cecilia; I know she is awake now, and you will be hurried after breakfast."

Elliott looked reproachfully at Miss Stanley, for she thought it much better for her lady to be engaged in more indifferent matters till after breakfast, when she would have but a few minutes to spend with her daughter; so Helen, correcting herself, added—

"But, perhaps I 'm wrong, so do not let me interrupt you in whatever you are doing."

"My dear child," said Lady Davenant; "you do not know what you are saying or doing yourself, this morning."

But no suspicion was excited in her mind, as she accounted for Helen's perturbation by the sorrow of their approaching separation, and by the hurry of her spirits at Beauclerc's arrival the day before. So all went on without further observation, and then came the meeting the General at breakfast, which Helen dreaded; but so composed, so impenetrable was he, that she could hardly believe that anything could have occurred that morning to agitate him.

Lady Davenant, after being with her daughter, came to take leave of Helen, and said gravely,

"Helen! remember what I said of Cecilia's truth, my trust is in you. Remember, if I never see you again, by all the love and esteem I bear you, and all which you feel for me, remember this my last request — prayer — adjuration to you,—support, save Cecilia!"

At that moment the General came to announce that the carriage was ready; promptly he led her away, handed her in, and the order to "drive on," was given.

Lady Davenant's last look, her last anxious

smile, was upon Helen and Beauclerc as they stood beside each other on the steps, and she was gone.

Helen was so excessively agitated that Beauclerc did not attempt to detain her from hurrying to her own room, where she sat down, and endeavoured to compose herself. She repeated Lady Davenant's last words, "Support, save Cecilia," and, unlocking the cabinet in which she had deposited the fatal letters, she seized the bag that contained them, and went immediately to Cecilia. She was in her dressing-room, and the General sitting beside her on the sofa, upon which she was resting. He was sitting directly opposite to Helen as she entered; she started at the sight of him: his eye instantly fell upon the bag, and she felt her face suddenly flush. He took out his watch, said he had an appointment, and was gone before Helen raised her eyes.

"My dearest friend, come to me, come close to me," cried Cecilia, and, throwing her arms round Helen, she said, "Oh, I am the happiest creature now!"

"Are you?" said Helen.

"Yes, that I am, and I thank you for it; how much I thank you, Helen, it is impossible

to express, and better I love you than anything upon earth but Clarendon himself, my best friend, my generous Helen. Oh, Clarendon has been so kind, so very kind! so sorry for having alarmed me! He is a noble, charming creature. I love him a thousand times better than I ever did, am happier than I ever was! and all this I owe to you, dearest Helen. But I cannot get your eyes from that bag,— what have you there?"

"The letters," said Helen.

"The letters!" exclaimed Cecilia, springing up, "give them to me," seizing and opening the bag. "Oh, that dreadful perfume! Helen, open the window, and bolt the door, my dear — both doors."

While Helen was doing so, Cecilia struck one little quick blow on a taper-lighter; it flared, and when Helen turned, one of the letters was in flames, and Cecilia continued feeding the flame with them as fast as ever it could devour.

"Burn! burn! there, there!" cried she, "I would not look at any one of them again for the world; I know no more what is in them than if I had never written them, except those horrid, horrid words Clarendon saw and shewed me. I cannot bear to think of it.

There now," continued she, as they burned, "no one can ever know anything more about the matter: how glad I am to see them burning!—burnt! safe! The smell will go off in a minute or two. It is going,—yes, gone! is not it? Now we may breathe freely. But you look as if you did not know whether you were glad or sorry, Helen."

"I believe it was right; the General advised me to lock them up," said Helen, "but then——"

"Did he? how thoughtful of him! But better to burn them at once; I am sure it was not my fault that they were not long ago destroyed. I was assured by that abominable man — But no matter, we will never think of him again. It is done now—no, not completely yet," said she, looking close at the half white, half black burnt paper, in which words, and whole lines, still appeared in shrunken but yet quite legible characters. "One cannot be too careful," and she trampled on the burnt paper, and scattered the cinders. Helen was anxious to speak, she had something important to say, but hesitated; she saw that Cecilia's thoughts were so far from what she wanted to speak of that she could not instantly say it; she could

not bear to overturn all Cecilia's present happiness, and yet, said she to herself, I must—I must—or what may happen hereafter? Then forcing herself to speak, she began, "Your mother is safe now, Cecilia."

"Oh yes, and thank you, thank you for that——"

"Then now, Cecilia—your promise."

"My promise!" Lady Cecilia's eyes opened in unfeigned astonishment. "What promise!—Oh, I recollect, I promised—did I?"

"My dear Cecilia, surely you cannot have forgotten."

"How was it?"

"You know the reason I consented was to prevent the danger of any shock to Lady Davenant."

"Well, I know, but what did I promise?"

The words had in reality passed Lady Cecilia's lips at the time without her at all considering them as a promise, only as a means of persuasion to bring Helen to her point.

"What *did* I promise?" repeated she.

"You said, 'As soon as my mother is safe, as soon as she is gone, I will tell my husband all,'—Cecilia, you cannot forget what you promised."

"Oh no, now I remember it perfectly, but I

did not mean so soon. I never imagined you would claim it so soon; but some time I certainly will tell him all."

"Do not put it off, dearest Cecilia. It must be done — let it be done to-day."

"To-day!" Lady Cecilia almost screamed.

"I will tell you why," said Helen.

"To-day!" repeated Lady Cecilia.

"If we let the present *now* pass," continued Helen, "we shall lose both the power and the opportunity, believe me."

"I have not the power, Helen, and I do not know what you mean by the opportunity," said Cecilia.

"We have a reason now to give General Clarendon — a true good reason, for what we have done."

"Reason!" cried Lady Cecilia, "what can you mean?"

"That it was to prevent danger to your mother, and now she is safe; and if you tell him directly, he will see this was really so."

"That is true, but I cannot — wait till to-morrow, at least."

"Every day will make it more difficult. The deception will be greater and less pardonable.

If we delay, it will become deliberate falsehood, a sort of conspiracy between us," said Helen.

"Conspiracy! Oh, Helen, do not use such a shocking word, when it is really nothing at all."

"Then why not tell it?" urged Helen.

"Because, though it is nothing at all in reality, yet Clarendon would think it dreadful —though I have done nothing really wrong."

"So I say — so I know," cried Helen; "therefore ——"

"Therefore let me take my own time," said Cecilia. "How can you urge me so, hurrying me so terribly, and when I am but just recovered from one misery, and when you had made me so happy, and when I was thanking you with all my heart!" said Cecilia.

Helen was much moved, but answered as steadily as she could. "It seems cruel, but indeed I am not cruel."

"When you had raised me up," continued Cecilia, "to dash me down again, and leave me worse than ever!"

"Not worse — no, surely not worse, when your mother is safe."

"Yes safe, thank you — but oh, Helen, have you no feeling for your own Cecilia?"

"The greatest," answered Helen, and her tears said the rest.

"You, Helen! I never could have thought you would have urged me so!"

"O Cecilia! if you knew the pain it was to me to make you unhappy again,—but I assure you it is for your own sake. Dearest Cecilia, let me tell you all that General Clarendon said about it, and then you will know my reasons." She repeated as quickly as she could all that had passed between her and the General, and when she came to this declaration that, if Cecilia had told him plainly the fact before, he would have married with perfect confidence, and, as he believed, with increased esteem and love, Cecilia started up from the sofa on which she had thrown herself, and exclaimed,

"O that I had but known this at the time, and I *would* have told him."

"It is still time," said Helen.

"Time now? — impossible. His look this morning. Oh! that look!"

"But what is one look, my dear Cecilia, compared with a whole life of confidence and happiness?"

"A life of happiness! never, never for me, in that way at least, never."

"In that way and no other, Cecilia, believe me. I am certain you never could endure to go on concealing this, living with him you love so, yet deceiving him."

"Deceiving! — do not call it deceiving, it is only suppressing a fact that would give him pain; and when he can have no suspicion, why give him that pain? I am afraid of nothing now but this timidity of yours — this going back. Just before you came in, Clarendon was saying how much he admired your truth and candour, how much he is obliged to you for saving him from endless misery; he said so to me, that was what made me so completely happy. I saw that it was all right for you as well as me, that you had not sunk, that you had risen in his esteem."

"But I must sink, Cecilia, in his esteem, and now it hangs upon a single point — upon my doing what I cannot do."

Then she repeated what the General had said about that perfect openness which he was sure there would be in this case between her and Beauclerc. "You see what the General expects that I should do."

"Yes," said Cecilia, and then indeed she looked much disturbed. "I am very sorry

that this notion of your telling Beauclerc came into Clarendon's head — very, very sorry, for he will not forget it. And yet, after all," continued she, "he will never ask you point blank, 'Have you told Beauclerc?' — and still more impossible that he should ask Beauclerc about it."

"Cecilia!" said Helen, "if it were only for myself, I would say no more; there is nothing I would not endure—that I would not sacrifice —even my utmost happiness."—She stopped, and blushed deeply.

"Oh my dearest Helen! do you think I could let you ever hazard that? If I thought there was the least chance of injuring you with Granville! — I would do anything — I would throw myself at Clarendon's feet this instant."

"This instant — I wish he was here," cried Helen.

"Good Heavens? do you?" cried Lady Cecilia, looking at the door with terror — she thought she heard his step.

"Yes, if you would but tell him — O let me call him!"

"Oh no, no! Spare me — spare me, I cannot speak now. I could not utter the words; I

should not know what words to use. Tell him if you will, I cannot."

"May I tell him?" said Helen, eagerly.

"No, no—that would be worse; if anybody tells him it must be myself."

"Then you will now — when he comes in?"

"He is coming!" cried Cecilia."

General Clarendon came to the door — it was bolted.

"In a few minutes," said Helen. Lady Cecilia did not speak, but listened, as in agony, to his receding footsteps.

"In a few minutes, Helen, did you say? — then there is nothing for me now, but to die — I wish I could die — I wish I was dead."

Helen felt she was cruel, she began to doubt her own motives; she thought she had been selfish in urging Cecilia too strongly, and going to her kindly, she said,

"Take your own time, my dear Cecilia; only tell him — tell him soon."

"I will, I will indeed, when I can — but now I am quite exhausted."

"You are indeed," said Helen, "how cruel I have been! — how pale you are!"

Lady Cecilia lay down on the sofa, and

Helen covered her with a soft India shawl trembling so much herself that she could hardly stand.

"Thank you, thank you, dear, kind Helen; tell him I am going to sleep, and I am sure I hope I shall."

Helen closed the shutters — she had now done all she could; she feared she had done too much, and as she left the room, she said to herself, — "Oh, Lady Davenant! if you could see — if you knew — what it cost me!"

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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